



March 18th, 2025

Chair Hartman, Vice-Chairs Nguyen and Scharf, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Ira Cuello-Martinez and I am the policy advocacy director at PCUN, Oregon's Farmworker Union. At PCUN, we work to empower farmworkers and Latinx working families to improve their working conditions through community building, organizing, and policy advocacy.

On behalf of our members, I am writing to express our strong support for HB 2976.

In Oregon, there are about 72,000 hand-harvest farmworkers and 40% of those farmworkers identify as Indigenous of Mexico and/or Central America and speak exclusively Indigenous languages¹. The majority of our members live and work in the Mid-Willamette Valley where the top Indigenous languages spoken are Purepecha, Zapoteco, Mam, and Mixteco.

During the pandemic, Indigenous communities were amongst those who were disproportionately impacted due to barriers to Indigenous language access to COVID-19 mitigation measures. Seeing the barriers our communities faced, PCUN fundraised significantly and advocated for there to be Indigenous language access and mitigation measures. Additionally, PCUN ensured that all of the top spoken Indigenous languages were accessible through the Oregon Worker Relief Fund and have made efforts to hire staff who have Indigenous language skills to support with our outreach and education. Organizations like PCUN, Pueblo Unidos, and others have worked to ensure Indigenous communities are not excluded from essential services and programs.

There are over 50,000 Oregonians who speak an Indigenous language as their primary language, but the current lack of Indigenous interpretation services too often leads to Indigenous Oregonians being denied life-saving care due to language barriers, an inability to access critical services, or imprisonment and deportation. Our members who speak Indigenous languages have also expressed how they wish they could understand what is happening in their children's schools to be more involved in their education.

As our state moves forward, we need to ensure that Indigenous communities are no longer left behind or excluded and that they are represented and have a direct voice in decision making. We also need to ensure that Indigenous interpreters who provide these important services are paid a living wage. As farmworkers, our members understand that being labeled "essential" does not mean being paid like you are valued. Indigenous interpreters provide essential services to our communities and we want to make sure they are paid fairly for their skills.

HB 2976 would allocate funding to develop language proficiency evaluations, recruit and retain a qualified workforce, and coordinate appointments across many different entities, helping

¹ http://www.adph.org/ALPHTN/assets/042309_promote.pdf

remove significant barriers for individuals needing interpretation services in some of life's most critical moments.

No Oregonian should be faced with language access barriers in emergency rooms, nor if they need to seek legal assistance after becoming a victim of crime. We urge your support for HB 2976.

Thank you.

Ira Cuello-Martinez
Policy Advocacy Director
PCUN