

To: House Health Care  
From: Alicia Temple, Oregon Law Center  
Date: March 12, 2019  
Re: Access to dental services for COFA, HB 2706

Chair Salinas and members of the committee:

On behalf of the Oregon Law Center (OLC), I respectfully request your support for HB 2706 to extend access to dental services for members of the Compact of Free Association (COFA).

OLC is a non-profit organization that provides free legal help to people struggling to make ends meet. Our mission is to achieve justice for low-income communities in Oregon by providing a full range of the highest quality civil legal services. We advocate for our clients and for the services and programs that help them to both overcome poverty and achieve justice. Providing access to healthcare services for the COFA population is an issue of justice.

Access to justice for this population has a long and checkered history, going back to treaties during World War II, the nuclear testing after the War, and the exclusion of federal benefits, including Medicaid, with the passage of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act (aka, "Welfare Reform") in 1996. When Medicaid match was no longer available to states, Oregon chose not to cover the COFA population, along with Legally Present Residents (LPR). There are steps we can take now to help remedy these choices, and HB 2706 is one of them.

HB 2706 will establish a COFA Dental Program that will provide dental care to low-income citizens of Pacific Island countries with Compacts of Free Association who reside in Oregon and lack access to affordable dental. The premium assistance program established through HB 4071 increased access to vital healthcare services, but did not include access to oral health. Oral health impacts more than an individual's teeth, it has wide-ranging consequences for physical health and quality of life.

Please support HB 2706 to provide dental health services for low-income members of COFA.

Thank you.