



PORTLAND JACL

SUPPORTING CIVIL RIGHTS SINCE 1928

April 14, 2019

To: Joint Committee on Transportation

RE: House Bill 2015: Equal Access to Roads Act

Co-Chair Senator Lee Beyer, Co-Chair Representative Caddy McKeown, and Members of the Joint Committee on Transportation

The Portland Japanese Citizens League urges you to support HB 2015. We are the oldest Asian American civil rights organization in the country and we have been fighting challenges to our rights since 1928. Unfortunately Oregon has a long history of legislatively discriminating against Asians and people of color. In 1859, Oregon wrote into its constitution that no Negro could reside in this state and “no Chinaman could own property in this state.” In 1923, the Klu Klux Klan sponsored and passed a bill limiting land and property rights to citizens and those eligible for naturalization. It was a legal way to prevent hardworking farmers born in Japan from purchasing and owning land. It was also at a time that there was no legal way for an immigrant from Asia to become a naturalized citizen. This was the past and our legislature now has an obligation to pass laws that promote equity and fair treatment.

House Bill 2015 would allow all Oregon residents the ability to drive legally. It would require all drivers to pass a written safety exam and driver’s test and therefore have the ability to obtain insurance. This makes our roads safer for everyone. In 2014, a group that has been identified as a hate group by the Southern Poverty Law Center, proposed Measure 88 which took away the ability to legally drive for people who could not prove their legal residency in the state. Unfortunately this measure was passed by the voters. The unstated purpose of this measure was to make it harder for people to obtain a license much in the same way the Alien Land Law made it harder for the Japanese and Chinese to purchase property.

Prior to 1993, no state asked for proof of legal residency as a requirement for obtain a driver’s license. Being unable to obtain a legal way to drive puts immigrants without legal status in an impossible situation of risking arrest and deportation or not driving and therefore not being able to provide for their family. In many rural areas of the state it is not practical or safe for people rely on public transportation walking or biking.

We want a state that is welcoming and supportive of our immigrant neighbors and gives them an equal opportunity to work and go to school. Please think about the purpose of denying the people the right to get a legal way to drive. It does not make our community safer. The Portland JACL encourages the committee to pass this bill. Our legislation should reflect our values.

Respectfully,

Marleen Wallingford, President



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