

**TO: The House Health Care Committee**  
**FR: Gianna Russo-Mitma MS, LMFT, COPACT Member**  
**DA: February 10, 2020**  
**RE: House Bill 4161**

---



Chair Salinas and Members of the Committee,

The Coalition of Professional Associations of Counselors and Therapists (COPACT) advocates for the 6000 Licensed Professional Counselors and Marriage and Family Therapists and Registered Interns who provide mental health care to over 100,000 Oregonians each week through their work in agencies, universities, corrections, health clinics, rehabilitation, and private practice.

**I write in support of HB 4161 and urge that you move it to the floor with a DO PASS recommendation.** As mental health professionals, we see firsthand the negative impact of structural, institutional and interpersonal racism and oppression on the health and well-being of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) and other priority populations. HB 4161 takes a thoughtful approach first step in addressing this urgent problem.

According to a [CDC-Kaiser study](#) on Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), early trauma can disrupt neurological development, leading to emotional and cognitive impairment, disease and disability later in life, and even early death. As we have now seen in [multiple studies](#), ACE trauma can also include things like the chronic stress of racism and discrimination. Unfortunately, as studies have shown, racism and discrimination occur during healthcare interactions. Additionally, according to a report given to the [World Health Organization](#), at the macro level of society, there is a strong association between labor and work inequity and unfavorable health outcomes. As clinicians, we have seen these impacts many times with lower paid workers due to citizenship status and language barriers. If we as a state can aid in health disparities of marginalized folks, we will have healthier individuals who live longer, healthier, and more equitable lives.

COPACT specifically supports the Regional Health Equity Coalition model, which prioritizes leadership and the voices of communities of color and those on the front lines of addressing health inequities, toward systemic change built upon the wisdom and strengths of the priority populations.

Addressing health/mental health disparities in Oregon cannot wait—we know firsthand that it is a legitimate emergency.

**Thank you for tackling this urgent and important matter. On behalf of the thousands of counselors and therapists across Oregon, COPACT strongly supports HB 4161 and urges Committee members to move it to the floor with a DO PASS recommendation.**