



Testimony in Support of House Bill 2991

March 2, 2021

House Committee on Rules

Russell Lum

Good afternoon Chair Warner, Vice Chairs Drazan and Holvey, and members of the committee. My name is Russell Lum and I am a political organizer for Oregon Nurses Association. We represent 15,000 nurses — including RNs and advanced practice nurses — and allied health workers. Oregon Nurses Association and the Nurse Practitioners of Oregon recognize that racism is a public health crisis producing (and having produced, over generations) negative health outcomes for marginalized groups. Oregon nurses support HB 2991 because racial and ethnic impact statements make it easier to assess whether bills and amendments will exacerbate these disparities versus alleviate them. The bill if passed will serve to reduce harms from policymaking, whether that harm be explicit or tacit or unintended, and better still obviously, to use state law to advance equity.

The racial and ethnic dimensions to our state's challenges clearly stand in the way of success of our ONA members, both in respect as caregivers *and* where they are Oregonians of color. Simply, systemic racism and discrimination means certain people are sicker for longer. Health data show correlation between race/ethnicity and earlier onset of disease, disproportionate suffering from chronic conditions, higher rates of mental illness, poorer maternal and infant health outcomes, heightened risk of auto-immune complications (including cancer), and lower life expectancies.¹

Racial and ethnic impact statements on their own do not have the power to correct inequity, either in health directly or the myriad realities which are the upstream determiners of health. However, the mandated racial/ethnic impact statement is a well-considered tool to improve to legislative process and an important commitment for the State to make. Hand in hand with bringing forth bill ideas that address inequality and inequity head on, this will improve lives.

The statements are of benefit indeed for both bills that are naturally seen to speak to race issues and those bills which are seen as unrelated to race. HB 2991 and its approach should be commended for acknowledging that policies have unintended consequences, that seemingly neutral policies slip into reinforcements of a harmful racial normal. Thank you for considering unpacking this normal, by bill by bill for future legislative sessions, with your hearing of HB 2991 and please join ONA in support of it.

¹ See <https://www.oregon.gov/oha/PH/ABOUT/Documents/sha/state-health-assessment-full-report.pdf>, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3442603/>, and <https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2017/11/11/562623815/scientists-start-to-tease-out-the-subtler-ways-racism-hurts-health>