

## **SB 706 – Medical Assistance and Compact of Free Association (COFA) Outreach**

### **Testimony of John Mullin: johnmullinhce@gmail.com**

Madam Chair, members of the Committee, my name is John Mullin, and I am pleased to have this opportunity to testify in favor of SB 706.

By way of quick background, I have been involved in human services work for 45 years. I have worked with numerous coalitions in advocating for the elderly, people with disabilities, and individuals and families with low incomes. That said, I am here on my own, as a citizen advocate.

Relative to this discussion, I worked with the Oregon chapter of the COFA Alliance National Network (CANN) and the COFA community in 2016 on HB 4071, the COFA premium assistance bill. At that time, I was working for the Oregon Law Center, and as you know, OLC works on “access to justice for Oregon’s low income communities.”

I testified then that assistance for COFA residents was not only a matter of service, but also a matter of justice. At that time, the history and the plight of the COFA community was not well known. Thanks to advocates and the Legislature, there has been much good discussion, education, and bipartisan support to provide services and opportunities for Oregon’s COFA population.

And now that there has also been some reform at the national level, the COFA population can apply for Medicaid. But I would point out that while eligibility is key, information and assistance with access is vitally important. Language and cultural issues are present, but in the case of the COFA population there is an additional barrier. And that is because of national past decisions to exclude the COFA population from public benefits. Simply put, many people have limited information and assume they are not eligible for benefits, let alone something as complex as Medicaid. That is why a culturally appropriate outreach effort is so important.

In closing, I ask for your support - specifically for SB 706 - and will add that I am also supportive of the full COFA legislative agenda for this session. Thank you for your consideration.