

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 619

Dear Members of the Senate Judiciary Committee,

Our country has never fully examined, reckoned with, or accounted for the harms and cruelty of slavery, and neither has the State of Oregon. The trauma of the horrific violence committed against slaves has been passed down for generations, robbing the descendants of slaves of their humanity and generational wealth. Jim Crow laws and the policy decisions, militarization of police, and era of mass incarceration since then have institutionalized racism, inequality, and discrimination, ensuring that Black people are subjected to continued injustice.

Not only is reparations for African Americans a moral imperative, there is long standing legal precedent for it. First, according to the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (1969) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1976), to which the U.S. is a party, people have the right to an effective remedy for human right violations committed against them, including racial discrimination. Second, under international human rights law (U.N. General Assembly Resolution 50/147 of 16, December 2005), governments have an obligation to provide effective remedies for violations of human rights; and victims, people who individually or collectively suffered harm, should receive full and effective reparations that are proportional to the gravity of the violation and the cumulative harm suffered. Third, in 1980, the U.S. Congress established a commission to investigate the forced relocation and internment in camps of Japanese Americans and others during World War II, which paved the way for a formal reckoning with these serious human rights abuses, including financial compensation to surviving victims.

Our government must not only acknowledge the past and present harms against the Black community in our state, it must actually deliver reparative justice. African Americans in Oregon have never been compensated for the brutal and inhumane treatment they have endured throughout history and continue to suffer from today. We ask that you please pass this bill and grant Black Oregonians the reparations they are owed.

Sincerely,

Showing Up for Racial Justice (SURJ)
St. Johns Chapter
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