

Date: March 21st, 2021
Chair Smith Warner and Members of the Committee,

For the record, my name is Laura Vigeland. I am a speech-language pathologist for the public schools in Salem. I am writing to request your support for HB2337.

HB 2337 declares racism a public health crisis in Oregon. Racism causes harm, trauma, illness, and death to Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) Oregonians. HB 2337 acknowledges that Oregon's very founding as a state was rooted in racist ideals, and the damaging impact of these and other racist policies continue to exist within our present-day policies and systems. Further, this bill signals the need for accelerated, intentional actions to heal these injustices and articulates six initial strategies and investments to address health inequities.

Systemic racism is pervasive and impacts all aspects of the lives of my students who are students of color. Healthy children are better able to participate and learn in school, so it is vital that all children have access to good healthcare. However, it is well known that communities of color are more likely to be uninsured (Oregon Health Insurance Survey, 2016), and people of color are more likely to have chronic illnesses. For example, African Americans (38.9%), Pacific Islanders (36.1%), American Indians and Alaska Natives (33.4%), and Latinos (29.1%) are more likely to experience high blood pressure in this state (Oregon Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, Preliminary race reporting data file, 2015 – 2016). These health inequalities need to be addressed by our state. Health inequities are preventable issues that when addressed provide significant cost savings not only to health systems, but also other systems related to the social determinants of health. More importantly, addressing these issues of racism improves the health and quality of life for all Oregonians.

HB 2337 was developed by the Oregon Health Equity Task Force which is composed of leaders and community-based organizations representing BIPOC, Tribal, and Immigrant and Refugee communities and includes six initial strategies that are responsive to the specific needs of their communities to reduce racial and ethnic health disparities. There are many proponents of this bill that can benefit my students and their families, such as increasing health equity through language access, increasing community voice in the legislative process, and removing barriers to increase access and quality of care in BIPOC communities.

Thank you for the consideration and for your service. I urge you to support HB 2337.

Sincerely,
Laura Vigeland
Salem, OR