

Structural racism is a cancer in our communities. The disparate impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on people of color and those in poorer communities without regular access to high-quality, affordable health care is the most recent evidence of the deadly consequences. HB2337 will create one small piece of the larger project needed to end this inexcusably unequal system which disadvantages too many of the state's residents.

Speaking from personal experience, I grew up in a poor family without health insurance or the money to see a doctor unless one of us was seriously injured or ill – with the consequence that my parents spent years in near-bankruptcy when setting a broken bone or other uncontrollable emergencies occurred. And, their inability to get regular medical care for themselves contributed to entirely avoidable adult onset diabetes and heart disease that troubled their older years and shortened their lives.

As an adult I was fortunate to secure work that provided health insurance, and to live in an area with many health care options close by. The difference in my well-being vs that of my parents is stark. I am grateful for this, but know that it is immoral as well as financially stupid for a society to let the whims of the marketplace and racism determine who has access to quality health care.

Health care is a human right. HB2337 will ensure that Oregon residents in underserved and poorly-served communities can receive health care services that meet their needs – a right that the majority of the state's white urban residents currently enjoy.

Nikki Mandell