



A Labor-Community Organizing Hub  
2710 NE 14th Ave. Portland, OR 97212 | 503.236.5573 | [www.jwjpx.org](http://www.jwjpx.org)

Date: March 21, 2021

Chair Smith Warner, Co-Chairs Drazen and Holvey and Members of the Committee

Good afternoon. My name is Betsy Zucker. I am here representing Portland Jobs with Justice, which is a coalition of over 100 labor, community and faith organizations, working together for social, economic, and racial justice in our community. I am a retired nurse practitioner, and the chair of JWJ's Health Care Committee.

Portland Job with Justice wholeheartedly endorses HB 2337, which declares Racism a Public Health Crisis, and we request your support for this Bill.

We understand, as HB 2337 acknowledges, that Oregon's very founding as a state was rooted in white supremacy, and this embedded racism continues to exist in our present day policies and systems. Now is the time to address Racism as a Public Health Crisis, and take meaningful steps to remove structures of white supremacy which diminish life outcomes.

HB 2337 takes important steps in addressing the serious racial health inequities we see in our state. The bill is brought forward by the Oregon Health Equity Task Force, composed of leaders and community-based organizations representing BIPOC, tribal, immigrant and refugee communities. Let us all listen, and respond to those communities most impacted.

COVID-19 has laid bare for all to see the deep health inequities entrenched within our current system. Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) Oregonians have borne the brunt of the pandemic, with significantly increased rates of COVID infection, hospitalization and death in these communities. Latinos represent nearly 40% of Oregon COVID-19 cases, despite the fact that they only comprise about 13% of the population. (OHA, 2020. COVID-19 Weekly Report: October 14, 2020). These communities are also more likely to have faced job losses, loss of healthcare, and labor in low wage and 'essential' frontline positions. Essential workers have made life-saving sacrifices and keep us nourished, cared for, and safe. Yet mortality rates for jobs in the food and agriculture industries, disproportionately immigrant workers, have jumped nearly 40% during the pandemic.

Even before the pandemic, racial health inequities were clear to all who cared to look. For example,

- Across the nation, life expectancy for Black Americans is 3.5 years less than for non-Hispanic white Americans.

- In Oregon, African Americans and American Indians and Alaska Natives experienced more years of potential life lost (YPLL) than any other race and ethnicity in the state (Oregon Death Certificate Data, 2016).
- African American women are three to four times more likely to die from pregnancy-related complications (Amnesty International, 2010; MMWR 2019).
- Communities of color are much more likely to be uninsured (Oregon Health Insurance Survey, 2016). Nationally, 19% of Latinx people, 11% of Blacks, and only 8% of whites are uninsured .(KFF.org)

We recognize the urgent need for legislation in helping to right these longstanding racial inequities. In 1965, with the passage of Medicare, hospitals across the country were desegregated, as they rushed to qualify for federal funding. In 2017, Oregon passed Cover All Kids, recognizing the importance of health care for undocumented children in our state. And now, HB 2337 creates a pathway for Oregon to take concrete steps to address our long history of racism and white supremacy.

We support the six specific strategies and investments of HB 2337 to address these health inequities:

1. Expand and support the collection of REAL-D data
2. Meaningfully invest in community engagement to identify future strategies
3. Health Equity Policy Analyst to disrupt policy from maintaining racist outcomes
4. Increase health equity through language access
5. Increase community voice in the legislative process
6. Remove barriers to increase access and quality of care in BIPOC communities.

Thank you for the consideration. Portland Jobs with Justice recognizes that the time is long overdue to declare Racism a Public Health Crisis. We urge you to support HB 2337.

We look forward to seeing Oregon lead the nation in declaring Racism a Public Health Crisis, and in taking these necessary and concrete steps to make our state a more equitable community for every Oregonian.

Sincerely,  
Betsy L. Zucker, MSN  
Portland Jobs with Justice