



# Oregon Pediatric Society

A Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics. Incorporated in Oregon

DATE: March 22, 2021

TO: Honorable Representative Rachel Prusak, Chair  
Representatives Andrea Salinas and Cedric Hayden, Vice Chairs,  
and Members of the House Committee on Health Care

FROM: Alanna Braun, MD, FAAP  
Oregon Pediatric Society Board President

SUBJECT: Testimony in Support of HB 2337 - Declaring Racism a Public Health Crisis

For the record, my name is Alanna Braun, MD, and I am a pediatrician and the board president of the Oregon Pediatric Society, the state chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics. As a general pediatrician, I see the toxic and very real adverse health effects of racism on my patients and their families every day. I write today in strong support of HB 2337, which the OPS board also voted to support.

In 2019, the American Academy of Pediatrics published its policy statement “The Impact of Racism on Child and Adolescent Health.” They note that “failure to address racism will continue to undermine health equity for all children, adolescents, emerging adults, and their families.” Racism affects people in every aspect of their lives – housing, schooling, work, and health. Generational effects from slavery, colonization, Jim Crow laws and other racist policies continue to cause health impacts in BIPOC communities across the United States.

We know that racism impacts birth disparities and mental health conditions in adolescents and children. Chronic stress, like that seen in people suffering from the effects of racism and long-term discrimination, causes an increase in stress hormones in the body that increases risk for chronic medical conditions, including heart disease, mental health diseases, and having premature or low-birth-weight babies.

Race is a social construct – humans share 99.9% of our DNA with each other, but as a society we have spent time focusing on our differences, rather than addressing and preventing the societal differences that have led to racial disparities. Racism is a major cause of disparities in medical care, even in my youngest of patients. While expansion in children’s health insurance programs has improved access to care for children, this remains a problem. The quality of care received is impacted by racism as well. A paper published in 2020 showed that Black infants cared for by non-Black physicians were TWICE as likely to die than if they were in the care of Black physicians. As a pediatrician that cares for newborn infants, that is appalling.



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Health equity is not possible until we address racism in our state and communities. We need to name this problem, to face it head on and start to work to mitigate the effects of racism. So please, let us name it: racism is a public health crisis, and we must act now. I urge you to support HB 2337.