

Date: March 23, 2021

Chair Prusak and Members of the Committee,

My name is Mary Vest and I am a Masters in Public Health candidate in Health Promotion at the OHSU-PSU School of Public Health, I am writing to request support for **HB2337**.

If we have learned nothing else in the past year, I hope it is that racism is, and always has been, a public health crisis. The COVID-19 pandemic has uncovered this truth as we see the increased prevalence of severe COVID-19 cases amongst BIPOC (black, Indigenous, people of color) communities, along with the powerful Black Lives Matter uprisings that have continued throughout the year in the wake of the murders of Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery and countless others who have been killed at the hands of those who are supposed to “protect and serve”.

As we have moved through these multiple unfolding crises, we see them reflected in what myself and my cohort have been exploring in classrooms; racism is a fundamental cause of health and disease and needs to be addressed as such. We cannot address the impacts of racism (health disparities such as the higher rates of COVID-19 in BIPOC communities, discrimination, etc.) without addressing colonial white supremacy first, all other interventions are mere band-aids. In Oregon, a state built on racist ideas, it is essential to begin addressing this at every possible level, which includes this bill.

B 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.

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

Sincerely,

Mary Vest

Portland, OR