

TO: House Committee on Rules
FROM: [Melissa Carlson-Swanson](#), Oregon Food Bank Tillamook
RE: **HB 2337 for our community**
DATE: March 23rd, 2021

To Chair Smith Warner and Members of the Committee,

For the record, my name is Melissa Carlson-Swanson. I am an advocate and Branch Services Manager at Oregon Food Bank in Tillamook. I am writing to request your support for **HB2337**.

Oregon Food Bank's mission is to eliminate hunger and its root causes. We pursue this goal in two key ways: we foster community connections to help people access nutritious food today; and we build community power to dismantle systems and policies that drive hunger and poverty. Systemic racism is a driver of hunger.

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.

As the pandemic began to unfold in March of 2020, when data was coming in constantly from multiple sources, the information was confusing and scary. But it was only information that was useful if you could understand it or you were already paying attention. Many low income families, with barriers to access to media, language, and health information, were largely left out of the huge amounts of information. Months passed before many counties provided translation services to answer the questions that came into their health departments in regards to COVID19, let alone do the outreach necessary to ensure that everyone was informed about the pandemic and the safety measures required to help prevent the spread. Many of these families were at much higher risk due to density in housing, essential work, and workplace conditions, making this information even more crucial and relevant for them.

We must invest in language access and increase community voice in the legislative process to increase health equity.

- Racism is pervasive and is integrated into every institution and system that is connected to the social determinants of health, and ultimately impacts Oregonian's ability to be healthy and well to the fullest potential.
- Racial justice requires the formation and purposeful reinforcement of policies, practices, ideologies and behaviors that create equitable power, access, opportunity, treatment, and outcomes for all people regardless of race and redistribute resources to invest where inequities are greatest.
- 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.

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

We have the opportunity to rebuild and emerge stronger from the crises our state has experienced. This is our moment to embrace our shared values, ensure equitable access to care for everyone and take bold action in support of all Oregonians.

I urge you to support HB 2337. Thank you for your consideration and your willingness to join Oregon Food Bank in building communities that never go hungry.

Sincerely,
Melissa Carlson-Swanson
Tillamook/Tillamook County Food Bank – Oregon Food Bank