

March 21, 2021

Dear Chair Smith Warner and Members of the Committee,

My name is Julia Wentzel. I am a health equity advocate in Tillamook County. I work in collaboration with both the Tillamook County Wellness Coalition's Access to Healthy Food Committee and the North Coast Chapter of the National Young Farmers Coalition. I write to request your support for HB2337.

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.

Oregon's legacy of white supremacy and systemic racism is apparent in present-day Tillamook County. Public health leadership in our predominantly white county lacks both the initiative and the information they need to proactively provide support for the people of color in our county who remain undercounted and underserved.

Progressive public health data shows that social determinants have profound impacts on our health. We know that stress, trauma, violence, and disenfranchisement disproportionately affect Black and Indigenous people and people of color, and that these factors have profound effects on the physical and mental health on the individual and generational scale. We know that experiences of racism perpetuate disparities in the health and productivity of our communities. But we lack the political will and financial support we need to measure these inequities, to identify barriers to access, and to design and implement programming that addresses these fundamental inequities. HB 2337 will provide a foundation for rural communities to learn what we need to know in order to do this work.

The Oregon Health Equity Task Force that developed HB 2337 include representatives from a number of BIPOC, Tribal, and Immigrant and Refugee communities, offering the State of Oregon an opportunity to hear, amplify, and answer the voices of historically marginalized groups. This Task Force has drafted a bill that offers clear and concrete initial strategies to reduce racial and ethnic health disparities in the communities that need it most.

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

To address a systemic issue, we must begin by naming it. This bill gives us the capacity to define the role racism plays in preventing our state from achieving health equity. It allows us to measure the manifestations of systemic racism in the health of our community, and to define actionable approaches to remedying inequity. I urge you to consider HB2337 and thank you for your time and your service.

Sincerely,

Julia Wentzel

Tillamook, Oregon  
Tillamook County Wellness Access to Healthy Food Committee  
National Young Farmers Coalition, North Coast Chapter