



Virginia Garcia Memorial
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To: Chair Smith Warner, Vice-Chairs Drazen and Holvey, and Committee Members of the House Committee on Rules

From: Juan Franco
Virginia Garcia Memorial Health Center

Date: March 23, 2021

Re: Support for HB 2337

Good afternoon Chair Smith Warner, Vice-Chairs Drazen and Holvey, and Committee Members:

My name is Juan Franco and I am the Policy and Advocacy Officer at Virginia Garcia Memorial Health Center in Hillsboro, Oregon. I am here today to urge you to support **HB 2337** declaring racism a public health crisis.

At Virginia Garcia, we provide high quality and culturally appropriate health care to more than 52,000 people a year that live and work in Washington and Yamhill counties. For more than 45 years, our mission-driven employees have worked tirelessly to address and remove the barriers to care many of our patients face, especially financial, economic and social challenges. Of the patients we serve, 98% have low-incomes, 48% are immigrants and refugees and 25% have no insurance.

Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, we witnessed how racism plays out as a public health crisis with the dramatically high COVID positive rate experienced by our patients – consistently at least 3 times higher than the Oregon average. We witnessed the concentrated harm this disease has in racial and ethnic minority communities, compounding existing inequities in income, housing, education, and employment. These inequities reflect a history of systematically racist policies.

As a Federally Qualified Health Center, Virginia Garcia is part of a network of safety-net providers across the nation that systematically provide robust anti-racist health care strategies, addressing intersections where racism persists. For example, since the beginning of the pandemic, we pivoted from providing 2% of our patient visits via telehealth to almost 90% less than a month into the pandemic. We created a COVID response team (CoRe team) and delivered health care and COVID screening with our mobile health unit where vulnerable community members live, work and worship. We provided access to voter registration, census education and shared information about the Oregon Worker Relief Fund. We engaged in countless partnerships with community-based organizations in our service area and across the state to magnify the diversity of voices affecting local and state policy.

From my lived and work experiences, one of the biggest lessons I have learned is that we must center the voices of communities of color to accelerate our collective understanding of how racism is integrated into the fabric of our society.

We are living through a paradigm shift energized by an increase in our collective pursuit of racial justice. The tension we are feeling is due to the conflict between the daunting reality of racism persisting in the social, political and economic systems we live in to shifting the narrative of our history toward a tipping point in favor of truth, reconciliation and healing.

It is time to move beyond the practice of declarative advocacy and progress towards undertaking community-informed, targeted and meaningful action to dismantle racism and systematize anti-racist approaches. Without this, our communities will not reap the benefits of such declarations.

I humbly request and urge you to support this bill and begin creating systems where all communities have the opportunity to thrive and pursue better health outcomes and quality of life.