

Kate Brown
Governor



Oregon Commission on Black Affairs
“Advocating Equality and Diversity”
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House Committee on Rules
Testimony in Support of HB 2337
March 23, 2021

Chair Smith Warner, Vice-Chair Drazan and Vice-Chair Paul Holvey, and Members Bonham, Fahey, Salinas, and Zika,

My name is Mariotta Gary-Smith, and I’m deeply appreciative of the chance to submit my written testimony in support of HB 2337. I’m speaking as a person who holds multiple roles: as a community member and advocate, an Equity Practitioner & former public health educator, and as a member of the OCBA (Oregon Commission on Black Affairs).

The past 15 months of COVID life have given full light to the health care crisis in the United States, and in Oregon. What many have experienced or witnessed for the first time - in terms of access to health care, services, and support - have been constant matters of life and survival for many communities of color in this state. While it’s been, and continues to be, difficult to witness the challenges that folks are facing with regards to health care access and need, the opportunity for Oregon to live up to the billing of being a progressive & inclusive state is here.

HB 2337 is an opportunity to actively engage Oregonians across the board to help improve how the medical systems engage its patients, employees and communities being served. From establishing an equitable & consistent practice about data collection, sharing and use; utilizing mobile health services to support the most impacted folks across multiple demographics; to local community consultation - where the wisdom and knowledge of these communities is honored and used to help engage responsible decision making; and last (in my testimony) but not least, to properly fund, staff and support the OACO.

It’s disconcerting to have heard over the last 18 months the repeated words of community, equity, and solidarity, and yet to expect communities of color to continue to bear the brunt of the work in terms of equity and inclusion. It’s disrespectful to say how the state of Oregon is dedicated to support and work in collaboration with its diverse communities but continue to underfund a state office that’s designed to represent their interests. As the country and this state continue to grapple with a post-COVID world, and the long impacts of the pandemic, it’s imperative that OHA be equipped to provide clear, consistent, and reliable support to endure CLAS (culturally linguistic and appropriate services) standards are understood and met in our health systems across the state.

This is a chance for Oregon to honor what their residents have asked for - to show up and represent in deed and action for all of us. Words are nice, but visible movement/work is better. HB 2337 is an important first step to establishing practices of collective work and collaboration.

It's time to speak the truth: that racism is a public health issue. It's time for Oregon to honor the hard work of the OACO - and show the support of this office with full staffing and resources to allow it to function at its full capability, to honor those who serve on the Oregon Advocacy Commissions and those who staff it.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mariotta Gary-Smith". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, stylized initial "M" and "G".

Mariotta Gary-Smith
Vice-Chair