

**Joint Committee on Ways and Means Subcommittee on General Government**  
**Re: SB 5501 Appropriate moneys from General Fund to OACO for biennial expenses**

Co-Chair Golden, Co-Chair Smith, and fellow Committee Members,

My name is Valdez Bravo. I am writing today in support of SB 5501.

I identify as a Veteran; as a Latino (my father immigrated from Guanajuato, Mexico in the mid-1970s); as the descendant of Standing Rock Sioux; as a US Army Veteran; as the father of a mixed-race household; as a senior healthcare administrator; as a former elected community college Board Trustee; and as a proud Oregonian.

As an active duty soldier for eight years, I had the opportunity to meet and work with a diverse set of people from all over America, and from all over the world. Our Army units taught us that our differences were not a weakness, that they made us strong and our units were tight-knit, truly cohesive. I feel lucky to have crawled through the dirt and gone to war with Americans who at first glance maybe didn't share much in common with me but who became lifelong friends due to our shared experiences and values. Our leaders treated us all equally and provided opportunities for equal growth regardless of race, gender, or position.

Starting back in 1995 when I joined the Army, and ever since my honorable discharge 8 years later, I have worked in health care, going on 25 years now. In my work as a health care professional, I strive to live up to the Baylor principles for high-quality care: safe, timely, equitable, effective, efficient, and patient-centered care. That is the true north for all that we do. We always seek to not only look at challenges of health care through an equity framework but ensure we are bringing forth and amplifying the voices of all Oregonians, to ensure that we are delivering care for everyone.

As a former community college Board member, Diversity Equity and Inclusion (DEI) was at the forefront of all that we did in trying to ensure that all students were presented equal opportunities to succeed, knowing that community colleges create a ladder to the middle-class - or higher.

In my community work outside of my day job at a hospital, I have supported groups and organizations who are working to ensure that the needs of all Oregonians are being met.

One of my favorite quotes, from a fellow Veteran by the name of Cal Henry, is "when you lift up the lives of Black Oregonians, you lift up all Oregonians." I truly believe that.

And that is why I believe that the Subcommittee should vote yes on SB 5501.

The OACO's mission is to support underrepresented communities.

Voting yes to fund the OACO will not only ensure that we are providing resources to the team who will support the Oregon Commission on Black Affairs, but also the Oregon Commissions on Hispanic Affairs, Asian and Pacific Islander Affairs, and the Oregon Commission for Women.

I believe it is critically important that we fully fund the agency that supports the community volunteer commissioners who do the heavy lifting of this equity and advocacy work every day.

All too often I have seen organizations create DEI focus groups, initiatives, or offices in order to address systemic racism and lift up communities. But all too often this work takes the form of a "check box" approach due to under-resourcing, sidelining, or involving too late in the process to make any kind of meaningful difference.

I don't want Oregon to fall into this trap. I find it sad that the OACO is among the smallest of state offices. While adding 1.5 FTE to the already tiny (2.5 FTE) office is only a small step in the direction that likely needs to be taken to adequately fund this important work, I believe it is an important next step.

Thank you to Co-Chairs Golden and Smith, and the members of the Subcommittee, for your Yes vote on SB 5501, and for providing the funding the OAC needs.

You will help lift up so many communities and you will make Oregon proud.

Valdez Bravo