



February 2, 2022

TO: House Committee on Healthcare
Chair Prusak
Vice-chairs Hayden and Salinas
Members of the Committee

Testimony by Oregon Physicians for Social Responsibility in Support for HB 4052: Declaring Racism a Public Health Crisis in Oregon

Oregon Physicians for Social Responsibility (Oregon PSR) submits this testimony in support of HB 4052. We are honored to join the many social justice groups and individual activists who have signed on to endorse this legislation that is part of a long journey toward identifying and correcting some of the many negative impacts that long-standing and widespread systemic racism have had on Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) individuals and communities in our state. We wish to thank Representatives Salinas for her sponsorship and tireless work for HB 4052.

Oregon PSR's four decades of activism for nuclear disarmament, environmental justice, and directing our national budget away from military spending and towards building a society where health and well-being are prioritized, is firmly rooted in our organization's core values of justice and equality. As Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. stated, the "evils of racism, poverty, and war" intersect to create huge inequities in our society. As an organization of health workers, our professional ethics requires us to carefully examine - and when needed, to remedy - the ways in which these structural evils contribute to harm both physical and mental health at individual and community levels.

As health professionals, we are aware that centuries of white supremacy and dominance beginning with the massacre, dispossession, and colonization of native peoples, economies built on enslavement, the disproportionate imprisonment of people of color and poor people, the violation of human and civil rights, and the concentration of extreme wealth into the hands of a small, mostly white, elite power structure are responsible for many of the inequities in health status experienced by BIPOC individuals and communities in this state, as well as nationwide.

In order to have healthy and thriving communities - a desire we hold for all Oregonians - the crisis of racism must be addressed. Disproportionate health impacts experienced by BIPOC Oregonians include: increased risk of living in neighborhoods at closer proximity to environmental toxins, less access to healthcare, increased risk of cardiovascular disease, asthma, adverse birth outcomes, poorer educational outcomes, higher risk of houselessness, higher poverty rates, less access to healthy nutrition, higher stress, increased exposure to trauma, increased risk of exposure to violence (including violence from the police), greater chances of incarceration, increased family separation due to deportation or detention of a parent, increased risk from the violence of hate crimes, daily microaggressions that are known to cause stress to one's immune system and other chronic health consequences,

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and the list goes on and on. As clinicians, we deal with these health disparities in the examination room, and as advocates for health, we address them through advocacy for social justice.

If ever there was a moment when the health gaps have become acutely evident, it is now in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. This virus has shone a light on so many health inequities with a ferocity that none can honestly deny. The virus knows no racial boundaries, yet from the disproportionately high representation of BIPOC individuals as essential frontline workers to the burden of the COVID-19 disease to the disparity of vaccine access, our ability to respond to this pandemic is constrained by the binds of racism.

Oregon PSR, as an organization of health professionals, is committed to addressing health problems at the community level. In this light, we applaud HB 4052 as it takes several critical first steps in moving our state forward toward health equity. Investing in improved accessibility to health care through pilot mobile health facilities is a good first step. The importance and wisdom of including BIPOC communities at a greater and more authentic leadership level in health policy, program priority and planning, and providing a culturally-specific health voice included in HB 4052 deserves all of our support.

HB 4052 is an important beginning step toward correcting grave health inequities due to the corrosive effects of racism. We wholeheartedly endorse this legislation and urge its passage by the Oregon State Legislature.

Thank you,

Maxine Fookson RN, MN, Oregon PSR Board Member

