



TO: House Committee On Health Care  
FROM: Beyond Toxics  
DATE: February 2, 2021  
RE: House Bill - 4052

Dear Chair Prusak, Vice Chairs Hayden, and Salinas, and Members of the Committee,

We are writing to request your support for HB 4052 relating to equity and declaring an emergency. My name is Meet Panhal and I serve as the Environmental Justice Statewide Projects Manager for Beyond Toxics. Beyond Toxics is a statewide environmental justice organization that advances policies that ensure meaningful participation and cultivate grassroots leadership from Oregon's frontline, rural, and impacted communities. Beyond Toxics envisions a state that upholds bold and intersectional policies and advances racial, economic, climate, and environmental justice to improve public health and community well-being.

Racial disparities in health and wellbeing have been well documented. The report from [World Health Organization](#) in 2008 stated that "health equity led to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' [Social Determinants of Health Framework](#) (SDOH), which recognized that racial health disparities are a result of inequalities in education, employment, healthcare, housing, and law enforcement." Racism causes harm, trauma, illness, and death to Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) Oregonians.

The journal on Structural Racism and the Disproportionate Impact of the Pandemic on Older Black and Latinx Adults concluded that the disproportionate burden of COVID-19 on Black and Latinx communities is a verifiable example of how structural and systemic racism leads to devastating health outcomes.<sup>1</sup> Garcia also states that "the racial/ethnic health inequalities among older adults has exposed longstanding and deeply rooted structural racism within American society." HB 4052 will take incremental steps to bridge the gap between affluent populations and priority populations with histories of poor health or social outcomes. Hence the need for this transformative action that addresses structural racism in order to achieve population health equity.

Further, vulnerable populations throughout Oregon carry the highest costs when a fire impacts a community. [Beyond Toxics spoke with community members](#) living near our southern office in Phoenix, Oregon, as they continued working to recover from the catastrophic Almeda Fire. Among the most significantly impacted by the fire were Latinx and senior community members. Many of these individuals were living in older mobile home parks that were destroyed by the fire, releasing toxins into the air and

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<sup>1</sup> Garcia, Marc A., et al. "The Color of COVID-19: Structural Racism and the Disproportionate Impact of the Pandemic on Older Black and Latinx Adults." *The Journals of Gerontology: Series B*, edited by Deborah S Carr, vol. 76, no. 3, Feb. 2021, pp. e75–80. DOI.org (Crossref), <https://doi.org/10.1093/geronb/gbaa114>.

onto the soils that put their health at risk.<sup>2</sup> HB 4052 can help ensure that communities who may experience post-fire health impacts have equitable access to culturally-appropriate healthcare.

Finally, exposure to extreme heat events is another example of how vulnerable populations are subjected to adverse health effects and will benefit from equitable access to healthcare. A study that was conducted during a heat wave in 2014 in Portland, Oregon, found residents that lived in neighborhoods that were more ethnically diverse, with low socioeconomic status, were likely to be exposed to higher ambient temperature compared to other neighborhoods in the city. This suggests an emerging concern of environmental justice as it relates to climate change.<sup>3</sup> A study that was done on 108 US cities, including Portland, examined the role of historic “redlining” policies as a mediator for exposure to ambient urban heat. It found that in most cities, neighborhoods that were located in areas that were formerly redlined remain predominantly lower income and communities of color that are at present experiencing higher ambient temperatures than other neighborhoods.<sup>4</sup>

HB 4052 is a historic piece of legislation that recognizes the history of systemic racism in Oregon, its lasting impacts on the health of Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC), and works to redress these harms.

Thank you for your consideration. We urge you to support HB 4052 to ensure that underserved and vulnerable Oregonians receive a level of health care that meets their needs and eliminates existing public health care disparities

Sincerely,

Meet Panchal  
Environmental Justice Statewide Projects Manager  
Beyond Toxics

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<sup>2</sup> Davidson, Kate, and April Elrich. “Their mobile home parks burned. Now rent is due.” October 27, 2020. <https://www.opb.org/article/2020/10/27/alameda-fire-wildfire-oregon-environment-economy/>

<sup>3</sup>Voelkel, J., Hellman, D., Sakuma, R., & Shandas, V. (2018). Assessing Vulnerability to Urban Heat: A Study of Disproportionate Heat Exposure and Access to Refuge by Socio-Demographic Status in Portland, Oregon.

<sup>4</sup>Hoffman, J. S., Shandas, V., & Pendleton, N. (2020). The Effects of Historical Housing Policies on Resident Exposure to Intra-Urban Heat: A Study of 108 US Urban Areas. *Climate*, 8(1), 12. <https://doi.org/10.3390/cli8010012>