



February 8, 2022

Senate Committee on Labor & Business  
Oregon State Legislature  
900 Court St. NE  
Salem, OR 97301

**RE: Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 1579**

Dear Chair Taylor, Vice Chair Knopp, and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on behalf of the American Civil Liberties Union of Oregon (ACLU of Oregon). The ACLU of Oregon is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization dedicated to preserving and enhancing civil liberties and civil rights, with more than 28,000 members statewide.

**The ACLU of Oregon supports Senate Bill 1579, which would establish an equity investment fund that will create generational wealth equity in Oregon's most economically vulnerable communities by growing small businesses, up-skilling workforces, and increasing homeowners.**

Mass incarceration and the war on drugs — including the incarceration of people of color for marijuana crimes before marijuana was legalized — has contributed to the ever-widening racial wealth gap for Black, Indigenous, and Latinx communities. At the ACLU of Oregon, we understand how the violation of civil rights and liberties and the continued systemic oppression of our Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) harms and burdens their economic stability. It is crucial there is economic justice for our BIPOC communities that addresses the wealth gap in Oregonians who have been impacted by mass incarceration, War on Drugs and economic racial disparities.

Currently, People of color in Oregon's prison population continue to be overrepresented. In 2018, Oregon Employment Department's data showed that average wages for Black, American Indian, and Latinx workers ranged from \$39,000 to \$45,000 annually, while their white counterparts earned at least \$10,000 more. White Oregonians have a higher homeownership rate at 65%, while only 44.8% of American Indian/Alaskan Native Oregonians, 32.2% of Black Oregonians, and 40.8% of Latinx Oregonians own homes in contrast. The pandemic exacerbated these disparities and as a result we observed, Black and Brown owned small businesses hit the hardest and BIPOC communities most negatively impacted.

Senate Bill 1579, The Equity Investment Fund, will invest ongoing funds in culturally-specific programs and organizations doing work to increase home and land ownership, workforce development, and entrepreneurship growth for Black, Indigenous, and Latinx communities. Senate Bill 1579, will create greater community resiliency of historically-disenfranchised and harmed communities which will strengthen Oregon as a whole. **For these reasons, the ACLU of Oregon urges you to support Senate Bill 1579 and pass it out of committee.**

Respectfully,

**Mariana Garcia Medina,**  
Senior Policy Associate  
ACLU of Oregon