

## Advocating for Equity and Diversity throughout Oregon

Dear Chair Dembrow, Vice Chair Weber, and Members of the Senate Interim Committee on Education:

For the record, we are Jackie Leung, Co-Chair of the Oregon Commission on Asian and Pacific Islander Affairs, and Melina Moran, Chair of the Oregon Commission on Hispanic Affairs. We are writing to you in regards to SB 272, which establishes in-state tuition rates for Micronesians of the Compact of Free Association (COFA citizens) who live in Oregon, and who attend or will be attending Oregon Health and Science University (OHSU).

COFA citizens are people from the Federated States of Micronesia (within the four states: Chuuk, Pohnpei, Kosrae, and Yap), the Republic of Palau, and the Republic of Marshall Islands. The three island nations have a unique immigration agreement with the United States government under a signed contract called the Compact of Free Association (COFA). This agreement allows the U.S. military to occupy the lands of the COFA islands. There is significant history and trauma on the COFA islands due to the agreement, including a history of atomic nuclear testing and forced relocation of families, with extensive damage to the environment and economy.


In return, the U.S. government committed to providing health, housing, and support for COFA citizens who remain in their respective island countries. COFA citizens, if they chose to travel to the U.S., are freely able to travel between their respective island countries and the U.S. states with a passport and I-94 visas, and are lawfully allowed to work, enroll into college/universities, and own property.

However, despite this promise under the compact, Micronesians from the COFA nations continue to face barriers, including the exclusion from state and federal services and higher-education financial assistance programs<sup>[1]</sup>. In the 2021 state legislature, state leaders passed SB 553, which provided in-state tuition for COFA citizens, bridging a small portion of those gaps. However, the law did not include exemption from nonresident tuition and fees for COFA students who attend Oregon Health and Sciences University.

SB 272 corrects this omission by providing an exemption from nonresident tuition and fees for Micronesian COFA students who attend Oregon Health and Sciences University.

The Oregon Commission on Asian and Pacific Islander Affairs (OCAPIA) and the Oregon Commission on Hispanic Affairs (OCHA) serves the people of Oregon to empower and support our constituents through our special roles as policy advisors to Oregon state policy makers and leaders. OCAPIA and OCHA are catalysts that empowers partnerships between state government and our community in rural and urban areas to ensure success for all Asian, Pacific Island, Native Hawaiian, and Latinos Oregonians by addressing longstanding and emerging

  
<https://www.oregonadvocacy.org/> 

503.302.9725 

[oaco.mail@oregon.gov](mailto:oaco.mail@oregon.gov) 

PO Box 17550, Portland, OR 97217 

issues at the policy level including but not limited to social, political, legal, and economic equity. Both OCAPIA and OCHA has several statutory duties, all of which revolve around advocacy and equity of our seven strategic priorities: Education; jobs and the economy; healthcare; justice, safety, and policing; stable families and housing; environmental justice; and civic engagement.

We urge you to support SB 272 to provide aspiring COFA Micronesian students the opportunity to enroll and be successful students at Oregon Health and Sciences University.

Sincerely,



Jacqueline Leung  
Co-Chair, OCAPIA



Melina Moran  
Chair, OCHA


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Footnotes:

1. Asian Pacific American Network of Oregon (APANO). (2015). COFA Fact Sheet. [https://www.apano.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/apano-COFA\\_final4.pdf](https://www.apano.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/apano-COFA_final4.pdf)



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