



February 1, 2023

Chair Patterson, Vice-Chair Hayden, and members of the committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Emerson Hamlin, and I am a political organizer for the Oregon Nurses Association. We represent 15,000 health workers, including RNs, advanced practice nurses, and allied health workers. I am here today to testify in favor of SB 564, which will increase access to health care for marginalized communities across Oregon by funding five additional regional health equity coalitions.

Our nurses see health disparities experienced by people of color constantly, and there is significant data to support their accounts. Community members of color consistently report lower access to health care and worse overall health. Here in Oregon, OHSU's Center for Health Systems Effectiveness found that 35 percent of women of color had no regular health care provider, compared with 18 percent of White women.¹ Other people of color report that they avoid seeking out medical care when needed, partly due to the lack of culturally and linguistically appropriate care. All of this results in worse health: Kaiser Family Foundation found that more Hispanic, Black, and American Indian/Alaskan Native adults described their health as poor in comparison to their White peers.²

Regional health equity coalitions work directly with impacted communities to address health equity issues that are contributing to these health disparities. As described in the Oregon Regional Health Equity Evaluation Report of 2017, local coalitions have taken on various projects meaningful to their communities.³ One coalition worked with a local CCO to provide medical care interpreter services, ultimately leading to patients and their families knowing more about their health and healthcare choices. Another developed a community informed health assessment for their local county health department, empowering that department to make choices that better support all community members. Yet another's work has contributed to declining teen pregnancy rate and narrowed the gap between pregnancy rates for Hispanic and White teens.

Our members strongly believe that experiencing good health should not be a privilege, and that every Oregonian deserves an equal chance to be healthy. Our members do their best to ensure that everyone gets meaningful, appropriate care, but they are also faced with the systemic failures that they cannot fix. That's where regional health equity coalitions are so valuable: they,

¹ OHSU Center for Health Systems Effectiveness (2018). *Oregon's Effort to Reduce Health Disparities Shows Signs of Early Success* [Fact Sheet] www.ohsu.edu/sites/default/files/2019-10/Brief_Disparities_FINAL.pdf

² Kaiser Family Foundation (2022). *Key Facts on Health and Health Care by Race and Ethnicity*. <https://www.kff.org/report-section/key-facts-on-health-and-health-care-by-race-and-ethnicity-health-coverage-and-access-to-and-use-of-care/>

³ Oregon Health Authority (2017). *Oregon Regional Health Equity Coalitions Evaluation Report*. <https://sharedsystems.dhsoha.state.or.us/DHSForms/Served/le2891.pdf>



by design, lift the voices that our health systems have long ignored, and help create better policy by and for the communities in which they are located. ONA urges a yes vote on SB 564.

Sincerely,

Emerson Hamlin

Political Organizer at Oregon Nurses Association