

Testimony in Support of Oregon Senate Bill 776
Sarah Clark, Portland
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Many thanks to Senators Frederick, Jama, Manning, and Woods and Representative Nelson for their leadership on this critical issue.

I'm offering my support for Bill 776 as a white person.

It is far past time we address the severe harms of Oregon's racist history, especially for Oregonian friends, neighbors, and family members who are Black / African-American and Indigenous / Original People. This bill is an important step toward justice and healing not only for the people harmed and their descendants, but for all of us. If we do not meaningfully demonstrate that we take care of all Oregonians equitably, then all of us must live with the psychological stress of injustice and the threat of future harm. As Fannie Lou Hamer so sagely stated, "Nobody's free until everybody's free." Uninformed people say reparations are not possible or feasible, that we can't afford them. This is simply not true. There are countless examples worldwide, including reparations paid by Germany after WW II; and there are also examples of the U.S. government paying reparations, going hundreds of years back in American history. Here are but two:

1. "In 1782, as the Revolutionary War raged on and the design of what would become the Great Seal of the United States was finalized, a Black woman named Belinda Sutton petitioned the Massachusetts legislature for reparations

from her enslaver and won." (<https://royallhouse.org/slavery/belinda-sutton-and-her-petitions/>)

2. "The Civil Liberties Act of 1988 gave surviving Japanese Americans reparations [\$20,000 each] and a formal apology by President Reagan for their incarceration

during World War II." (<https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/articles/redress-and-reparations-japanese-american-incarceration>)

Numerous other states and over a dozen U.S. cities have already forged ahead in establishing reparations commissions; some are already paying reparations. California is an excellent example and can serve as a roadmap for Oregon.

We don't bat an eye when giving millions of dollars in annual tax breaks to corporations that often don't need them. Why do we not prioritize funding basic justice centered on human well-being instead individual and corporate greed? It is financially possible to pay reparations; it's simply a matter of applying our democratic principles in the truest manner.

So many people know that it's past time we pay reparations, as a state and a country, that we're taking matters into our own hands, frustrated with the shamefully slow pace of government. Reparations are already happening in Oregon, as evidenced by countless mutual aid organizations and groups of citizens such as those with the Portland Housing Solidarity Project redistributing wealth on their own. I want to live in a state where all people are treated humanely; where we can be honest about our mistakes, own the harm done, and address it meaningfully and fully — and where justice is real.

Sarah Clark