

Submitter: Yulya Nakleushev

Committee: Senate Committee On Veterans, Emergency Management, Federal and World Affairs

Measure: SB776

Hello, and thank you so much for your time! I write to you as a white person and a long-term resident of Portland who deeply loves her community. As a Jewish descendant of holocaust survivors, to me, the adage “never again” means ending harm and healing harm of all peoples. It is my ancestral and spiritual obligation to take action towards repairing injustices and bettering our community and world. In this spirit, I urge you to pass Measure SB776 to ensure reparations for Black Oregonians.

Why reparations in Oregon? Black Oregonians have never been compensated for the brutal and inhumane treatment they have endured historically, and continue to experience today.

I reiterate this history:

“Oregon was birthed as a whites-only state from the very beginning. On June 18, 1844, the baby state of Oregon passed our first Black exclusion laws allows white settlers to publicly whip Black people 39 times every six months until they left the state. We reinforced this law again on September 21, 1849 with another exclusion law that prohibited “...negro or mulatto to enter into, or reside within the limits of this Territory.” The very next year we passed laws to give free land to white people. We tripled down on November 9, 1857, banned both free and enslaved Black people from residing in Oregon, owning real estate, making contracts, voting or using the legal system in any way. Although the laws were repealed a very long time ago, the racist language in Oregon's constitution wasn't removed by voters until 2002. Walidah Imarisha, Portland-based activist and scholar, reminds us that just 18 years ago — 30% of voters elected to keep the racist clause in the constitution. When we truly look our history square in the face, it becomes very clear why Lane County only has 1.1% Black residents, compared to the 13% national average. Oregon is 87% white for a reason. It was build and designed that way from the foundation up, and will continue to operate on those foundations until we stand up and make a change. With this task force, we have the opportunity to begin to make things right for our community members. Just as I have benefitted from the centuries of laws uplifting my people, Black community members have been harmed by centuries of laws excluding them, centuries of violence, centuries of futures interrupted and lost. Nothing could ever truly soothe the wound that has been caused from our country's history of enslavement, genocide and exclusion, but reparations is one place we can start to rip apart that old foundation and build anew.”