



Date: March 22, 2023
To: House Committee on Climate, Energy, and Environment
From: Stephanie Phillips Bridges, Policy Analyst for the Urban League of Portland
Re: Support for Community Resilience Hub, HB 2990

Chair Marsh, Vice-Chairs Levy and Levy, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Stephanie Phillips Bridges, and I am a Policy Analyst with the Urban League of Portland and I respectfully submit this testimony in support of House Bill 2990. The Urban League of Portland is one of Oregon's oldest civil rights and social service organizations, empowering African Americans and others to achieve equality in education, employment, health, economic security, and quality of life across Oregon and SW Washington.

When there are climate and environmental emergencies, Black communities are hit the hardest because of the neighborhoods we live in, and the health risks associated with our neighborhoods. Nationally, for Black populations, this is especially true as we are "75% more likely to live in close proximity to oil and gas facilities, which emit toxic air pollutants; as a result, these communities often suffer from higher rates of cancer and asthma. Researchers have found that Black children are twice as likely to develop asthma as their peers."¹ We also "face greater vulnerability to wildfires compared to predominately White communities (PLOS ONE). Native Americans, for instance, are 6 times more likely to live in areas most prone to wildfires."² And lastly, "Black households with incomes between \$50,000 and \$60,000 experience overall pollution burdens equal to those felt by White households earning \$10,000 or less."³ Two years ago, we saw how climate and environmental emergencies impacted Oregonians and the Black community.

In 2021, Oregonians experienced several emergencies simultaneously, including the COVID pandemic, wildfires, poor air quality, and extremely hot and cold temperatures. The state was not equipped structurally to accommodate such extremes. There was a lack of resources to support our most vulnerable Oregonians during each emergency, leaving many struggling to adapt or even die as each emergency arose. USA Today reported in an article in August 2022, "about 800 people died in Oregon, Washington, and British Columbia during that heat wave, which hit in late June and early July 2021."⁴ In Oregon, temperatures in every county nearly reached or surpassed 100 degrees, with some counties reaching 117 degrees. Most buildings in Oregon lack cooling systems as this was not a construction requirement since the highest temperatures fluctuated between 80-99 degrees for decades. Over the last decade, Oregon's weather has become unpredictable, and the highest temperatures have remained in the high 90s-100+s degrees. "Once-in-a-lifetime systems like the extreme heat in 2021 will likely occur more frequently"⁵ as stated in an OPB article in December 2021. The heatwave severely impacted

¹ The Guardian, America's Dirty Divide: How Environmental Racism Leaves the Vulnerable Behind, 2021.

² Medium, Environmental Racism by the Numbers, 2022.

³ National Geographic, The Origins of Environmental Justice and Why it's Finally Getting the Attention it Deserves, 2021.

⁴ USA Today, Pacific Northwest Heat Wave Suspected as Cause of 14 Deaths in Oregon, Officials Say, 2022.

⁵ OPB, 2021 Delivered 'Warning Signs of Things to Come' For Pacific Northwest Summers, 2021.



people in low-income areas which are predominantly home to people of color. The heatwave and lack of resources for relief led to 3 deaths of African Americans all in the Portland Metropolitan area, Jerome Ollison, James McKinley Dutton, and Ashlyn Maddox. Their deaths and the many others lost in the 2021 heatwave were both tragic and preventable. While efforts have been made, we have learned over the last few years with various types of climate and environmental emergencies that communities across Oregon do not experience these issues the same, and that community members as well as community-based organizations step in to fill voids where government agencies fall short.

Communities and community-based organizations have stepped up to support themselves during emergencies by building new or renovating existing buildings to be community resilience hubs. For example, when Oregon was experiencing “the Almeda fire in 2020, Coalición Fortaleza, a Latino/a/x (Hispanic/Latino)-led, intergenerational coalition in the Rogue Valley, stepped up to support the community where and when emergency resources and recovery support fell short. Coalición Fortaleza seeks to foster long-term disaster resiliency and financial autonomy for the Latino/a/x community in the face of climate change.”⁶ Across the United States, communities just like the Rogue Valley, experienced climate and environmental emergencies and community-based organizations stepped up. An article by the Guardian in 2022, shares that “across the United States, community resilience hubs are popping up to support communities, RYSE Commons in California, Boyle Heights Arts Conservatory in California, and Groveland Community Resilience Center in California.”⁷ Per the Guardian article, “community resilience hubs address immediate climate and weather emergency needs in addition to providing an array of services to combat racial inequities communities face. This can include child care, job training, water/food security, after-school programs, and much more depending on what the community needs.”⁸ The Guardian article also shares that “while creating community resilience hubs can be expensive (new or renovated), they are proving their effectiveness. Costs can vary depending on how spaces are retrofitted, with most spaces set up to be self-sufficient in the case of an emergency, meaning they have their own power sources, HVAC systems, and much more.”⁹ In an article by Crosscut released January 2023, “Seattle is looking to build resilience hubs to prepare for the anticipated bad weather/climate that is come and has been consulting with Boyle Heights Arts Conservatory in California for support.”¹⁰ Communities are starting to prepare for expected climate and environmental emergencies, this is important to underserved, underdeveloped, and underfunded communities which are usually home to communities of color.

With HB 2990, we can start the work to prepare our communities across Oregon, this continues the lifesaving efforts Legislators started last year. HB 2990 directs the Oregon Health Authority to develop and implement a grant program to support resilience hubs and networks in Oregon. Creating grant opportunities for resiliency hubs allows community members and community-based organizations to

⁶ Coalición Fortaleza, Coalición Fortaleza website, 2023.

⁷ The Guardian, ‘A Living, Breathing Building’: The Rise of Resilience Centers Amid Extreme Heat in the US, 2022.

⁸ The Guardian, ‘A Living, Breathing Building’: The Rise of Resilience Centers Amid Extreme Heat in the US, 2022.

⁹ The Guardian, ‘A Living, Breathing Building’: The Rise of Resilience Centers Amid Extreme Heat in the US, 2022.

¹⁰ Crosscut, A Resilience Hub Might be Coming to Your Seattle Neighborhood, 2023.



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cater the hub to their community to meet their needs. This will support rural and urban communities as well as communities of color, which we know are impacted the most during climate and environmental emergencies. Such as Black communities that are most likely to be low-income, underfunded, under-resourced, and underdeveloped neighborhoods. If we do nothing, our communities will continue to suffer during climate and environmental emergencies.

Please pass HB 2990, Oregon's communities are counting on you to see the value in a community resilience hub that can help provide relief and support during the emergency climate and environmental events that are to come.

Respectfully,

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