

Vice-Chairs Morgan and Nguyen, fellow committee members, for the record my name is Janelle Bynum, state Representative for House District 39. I am testifying in support of House Bill 3431 because of the dire necessity that we provide ongoing funding for the Oregon Economic Equity Investment Program.

The program was created last session to address our state's growing wealth gap, and received a one-time allocation of \$15 million from the state general fund. Today, I am advocating for ongoing funding via Oregon's marijuana tax account because while our state was one of the first to withdraw from the draconian policies of the "War on Drugs," Oregon is quickly becoming one of the few states that collects marijuana tax revenue but does not seek to redress the community wealth stripping caused by criminalization.

The direct impact of arrests and incarcerations, and the collateral consequences arising therefrom - ranging from the loss of housing assistance to food insecurity - fell disproportionately on minority and lower income communities. Cannabis prohibition also led to the separation of an unconscionable number of families through the prison system, deportation, and child custody proceedings. These separations often arose from activity that is now legal under state law.

In the ashes of prohibition has arisen a lucrative industry generating billions of dollars in private sector activity. This new industry is however almost completely white owned, and minority-owned businesses are largely closed out due to a lack of access to capital, which arose in no small part from the economic impact of the criminal justice system. The hundreds of millions of dollars in marijuana tax revenues our state collects are simply not being directed toward ameliorating the community wealth stripping that resulted from generations of over policing.

When I became chair of the House Judiciary committee in 2021, my colleagues and I passed some of the most effective criminal justice reforms in the country. Now, as chair of the House Economic Development committee, I am dedicated to ensuring that we address the unfinished work of securing economic justice for our most marginalized communities.

Economic justice is social justice, and just like any other form of justice, it cannot wait. It cannot be told to "slow down," to "take one step at a time, to "be patient." This is the fourth consecutive session in which legislation such as this has been introduced, and has been a top priority of the BIPOC caucus for the past several years. I would be remiss to not mention that this legislation takes a wide approach to solving our state's growing wealth gap by directly seeking to support our state's rural communities whose economic security has for far too long been ignored.

The mission of providing self-determination and economic self-reliance for our most vulnerable communities simply can no longer be deferred and we must secure ongoing funding for the Economic Equity Investment Program.

Colleagues, for these reasons I urge your support on House Bill 3431.