



Date: March 23, 2023

To: Joint Committee on Ways and Means - Human Services Subcommittee

From: Mercy Henderson, Founder of Mercy Connections Inc

RE: Support POP 406 of SB 5525

Co-Chair Campos, Co-Chair Valderrama, members - Human Services Subcommittee

My name is Mercy Henderson. I am here in support of SB 5525, particularly POP 406, which will invest monies in further modernizing work in statewide public health system, including support for grassroot community-based organizations like mine.

I am the founder of Mercy Connections, an organization founded in 2019 as a result of lived experiences. We serve West Africans refugees, immigrant and other Blacks in the Portland metropolitan Area.

This organization became pivotal during the covid-19 pandemic, because it is amongst the 170 other organizations to be funded by Oregon Health Authority, (OHA).

Because of OHA Covid 19 fundings, this grass root organization was able to step in and fill service gap by bringing culturally responsive support services to our underserved population. We conducted Covid-19 outreach and education, testing, hosted about 30 Covid-19 vaccination clinics and still ongoing. We also distributed 1000s boxes of culturally specific food, including protective and cleaning Supplies to our communities. Today, I can say that many of us got our covid-19 vaccination and booster, because of the work of this organization.

Before I end, I like to remind you that when refugees or immigrants like me come to this state, we come to seek a better life from the oppressions we faced in our various home countries, sometimes due to a civil war, farming, climate, or and political unrest. But soon, we and our communities get trapped in in equalities, health disparities, discriminations, and injustices and find ourselves experiencing new kinds of oppression in our newly found home. This is because of Oregon's longstanding systemic issues that cause structural barriers to adequate representation, support, and care for our communities, which also results in a lack of resource connection to our communities throughout the state. These kind of lack of support for our marginalized communities has to come to an end.

And the way you can do help do that is for all of you to support **SB 5525**, particularly **POP 406**, which will keep those lights on for CBOs, that OHA Covid 19 funding turned on.

Thank you for taking the time today to hear my story about why it is critical for you to support this bill.

Sincerely,
Mercy Henderson

“Knowledge is like a garden: If it is not cultivated, it cannot be harvested.”

African Proverb

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