

Submitter: Shelonda Simpson

On Behalf Of:

Committee: House Committee On Emergency Management, General Government, and Veterans

Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB2995

Dear Chair Tran, Vice-Chairs Grayber and Lewis, and Members of the House Committee on Emergency Management, General Government, & Veterans:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on HB 2995. My name is Shelonda Simpson. I am the Deputy Chief HR Officer for a local government agency living in East County Portland Metro. I am writing to express my strong support for HB 2995, which proposes the establishment of the Task Force on Reparations. This initiative is a crucial step toward addressing the historical & systemic injustices faced by Black Oregonians.

As a tax paying Oregon native, born at Bess Kaiser Hospital, & a proud Black American African I advocate on the passing & subsequent action required to bring House Bill 2995 to fruition. As you are aware, it establishes the Task Force on Reparations to study & develop proposals for financial & non-financial remedies for the past & current injustices that have affected African-American lives & livelihoods. In addition, there needs to be action to enact the recommendations from the task force to ensure a fair & equitable Oregon for all citizens. Reparations, in this way, serve as a way to compensate for the numerous human rights violations imposed on the lives & livelihoods of Black American African Oregonians. Many people consider reparations only to be defined as a compensation plan to repair the harms of slavery. They miss the inhuman treatment post-slavery policies like voter suppression, housing displacement, redlining, & uncompensated employment, along with other systemic policies & practices that oppress underserved communities; much of this list continues today.

As a descendant of VanPort survivors & former Bess Kaiser shipyard workers/nurses, I'd like to speak on behalf of my ancestors & elders as they have shared our Lincoln Family's rich history. Our family history is documented on OPB's Ghettoization of Albina Docuseries, The National Geographic Documentary researching freed Black Slaves with the surname Lincoln, & the NAACP Vancouver chapters history on First Black Settlers. 'Get the baby & run, run up that hill, don't stop, & don't look back!' My paternal great grandmother, Beulah Lincoln shouted at her daughter (my great aunt & the current Lincoln family matriarch) Alice. My great grandmother had just heard the sound of the levee failing & the sirens were starting to sound. Aunt Alice tells the story of when the levees broke at VanPort, & how they got out of the housing project with the clothes on their backs. There was no time to pack or prepare. There was no recompense for anything lost that would compare to

the livelihood lost in that flood.

While our family would like to think this would be the last experience that left them financially devastated, almost forty years later there was more systemic devastation to Oregon's Black community with the closing of Bess Kaiser Hospital. My maternal grandmother & her sisters moved to Portland from Texas in the late 40's & were apart of the Black women's workforce that worked as riveters on the war ships in the Kaiser Shipyards (until their nursing credentials in TX could be verified & they could return to their trained professions). They were some of the last nurses to take retirement buy outs as they were not financially prepared to drive from NE Portland to Clackamas for work each day. Losing their ability to provide for themselves at 60 years of age & older was devastating. But what healthcare system would offer American African nurses that close to retirement a livable wage? These two atrocities are a continuation of the devastation Black American African's have faced since the first slave ships landed here. Oregon's founding as an exclusionary state for Black people is a dark part of its history. Compensation isn't just giving money without recognition of the harms of dehumanizing people based on race — recognition, repair, & restitution of the harm of racial injustice, colonization & the denial of human rights