

Submitter: Gainell Irving
On Behalf Of: Irving and Johnson Family
Committee: House Committee On Emergency Management, General
Government, and Veterans
Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB2995

Today, I stand before you to advocate for reparations for African Americans in Oregon—an overdue measure to address the deep, enduring harm caused by a legacy of racism. Oregon’s history is fraught with exclusionary laws and discriminatory practices that systematically denied African Americans access to economic and social opportunities. During the Great Migration, many African Americans came to Oregon, drawn by the promise of work in our shipyards, only to face barriers that continue to impact our communities.

The economic disparities are glaring. In Oregon, white households hold nearly ten times the median net worth of African American households—a statistic that represents generations of systemic inequity. Reparations, whether through direct financial compensation or targeted investments in community resources, are not merely a gesture but a necessary restitution for these historical wrongs. A formal apology from the state must also be part of this process, acknowledging the pain inflicted upon African American communities and validating their experiences.

With current efforts underway to dismantle DEI initiatives, this is the right time to repair past injustices and help our society catch up. By leveling the playing field and ensuring that race is no longer a determinant of opportunity, we can move toward a future where every individual starts from an equitable position. Even though the narrative that African Americans aren’t qualified or capable is a complete falsehood, we must eliminate the conditions that force us to have this discussion. Embracing reparations is a crucial step in building a society where every person is truly recognized for their potential and contributions.