

Jeanine Morales
Community Member - NE Portland

RE: Testimony in Strong Support of HB 2995

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

I write to you today in strong and urgent support of HB 2995, a bill that is not only necessary but long overdue. As a Black woman, a native Oregonian, a mother, and a former foster youth and adoptee, I have lived through the impacts of this state's long history of racial exclusion, economic disenfranchisement, and systemic discrimination. My experiences are not isolated—they reflect the lived realities of thousands of Black Oregonians who have been systematically denied the opportunity to build stability, wealth, and security in this state.

Oregon has long positioned itself as progressive, yet its history tells a different story. From the exclusion laws that forbade Black families from settling here, to the destruction of Vanport that displaced an entire Black community overnight, to the construction of I-5 and the Emmanuel Hospital expansion that forcibly uprooted Black neighborhoods in Northeast Portland, the message has been clear: Black Oregonians were never meant to belong. These policies were not accidents or unintended consequences. They were deliberate, and their effects are still felt today.

I was raised in Northeast Portland, a community that once held promise for Black families despite the barriers we faced. I have personally felt the devastation of gentrification, watching as my neighbors were pushed out of the only homes they had ever known. I have seen the school system fail Black students, including my own daughter, who, despite her academic excellence, has experienced the same racial biases that I endured decades earlier. Black students in Oregon continue to be disciplined at disproportionately higher rates, excluded from advanced academic opportunities, and funneled into cycles of disenfranchisement that start in the classroom and extend into adulthood.

The impact of racial bias has not been confined to education. As a former foster youth, I have experienced firsthand the harm inflicted by a child welfare system that continues to disproportionately separate Black children from their families—often due to poverty-related stress rather than actual safety concerns. The trauma of these separations is lifelong, severing cultural connections, erasing family histories, and setting Black youth on a path where their futures are dictated by state intervention rather than self-determination.

These patterns are mirrored in the workforce, where I have faced blatant racism, discrimination, and professional barriers simply because I am a Black woman in a state that has never fully embraced the presence or leadership of Black professionals. The wage gaps, hiring biases, and systemic exclusion from economic opportunities have

ensured that Black Oregonians remain in a cycle where financial security is an aspiration rather than a reality.

The data confirms what I and so many others have lived. Black homeownership in Oregon has declined steadily for decades, a direct result of redlining, predatory lending, and displacement. Black workers continue to be twice as likely to be unemployed as their white counterparts, even when they hold the same qualifications. Black maternal mortality rates are three to four times higher than those of white women due to the racial bias that permeates Oregon's healthcare system. These are not individual struggles; they are structural and systemic failures that demand action.

Oregon has taken some steps toward acknowledging its racist past and present. The passage of the CROWN Act in 2022 ensured that Black Oregonians cannot be discriminated against for their natural hair, but it did not address the economic discrimination that persists in workplaces. The recognition of racism as a public health crisis was a necessary step, but Black families still struggle to access equitable healthcare. The homeownership investments made in 2023 were a start, but they have not dismantled the historic barriers that continue to keep Black Oregonians from owning homes. These policies, while meaningful, have been incremental, and incrementalism will not undo generations of systemic harm.

HB 2995 is Oregon's opportunity to take meaningful, tangible action toward repairing the damage it has inflicted on Black communities. This bill is not charity—it is long-overdue justice. For generations, Black Oregonians have been denied access to homeownership, economic stability, and generational wealth through deliberate policies of exclusion and systemic racism. HB 2995 seeks to address these injustices by providing direct investments in Black homeownership, funding Black-led organizations that serve the community, and creating economic opportunities that should have been available decades ago. These are not special privileges; they are basic necessities that Black Oregonians have been systematically denied.

However, true justice requires more than programs and institutions—it requires direct restitution. Black Oregonians should not be forced to rely solely on state-sanctioned institutions to recover what was stolen from us. Just as financial reparations have been given to other communities harmed by systemic failures, and just as Oregon currently provides direct financial support to migrants seeking stability in this state, Black families must be trusted with the same opportunity to build their own futures.

We are taxpayers, business owners, and community leaders who contribute to Oregon's economy, yet we continue to be excluded from direct financial relief and reparations. HB 2995 cannot be another symbolic gesture—it must be a transformative commitment that recognizes direct cash payments as a necessary form of economic justice alongside investments in homeownership, workforce development, and community-led initiatives. Anything less would be yet another failure to provide Black Oregonians with the justice and stability they have long been denied.

As a mother, an advocate, and a Black woman who has lived through every level of systemic oppression this state has imposed, I refuse to accept a future where my

daughter and the next generation of Black Oregonians inherit the same struggles. Without HB 2995, Black homeownership, economic security, and generational wealth will become obsolete in this state. The cycle of displacement, disenfranchisement, and exclusion will continue, and Oregon will once again fail its Black residents.

This legislature has the power to make a real difference. The time for performative equity has passed. The time for action is now. HB 2995 is not just a bill—it is a moral obligation. I urge you to support and pass HB 2995 without hesitation.

Sincerely,

Jeanine Morales