

Submitter: Jess Gustafson

On Behalf Of:

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

Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB2995

My name is Jess Gustafson and I am a concerned community member of Lake Oswego. I'm writing in support of HB 2995 because I believe transformative action must be taken to address the systemic inequities facing Black Oregonians. As a volunteer with Respond to Racism in Lake Oswego, I've witnessed how discrimination and anti-Black behaviors harm Black community members, causing lasting trauma and limiting opportunities to engage with all the city has to offer.

Overt and systemic anti-Blackness have a deep and enduring legacy in the state of Oregon. Oregon holds the dubious distinction as the only state to have passed Black exclusion laws in 1844, 1849, and 1857. As detailed by numerous sources, including the Oregon Encyclopedia, the state became a hotbed for the Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s, resulting in common sightings of Klan regalia and Klan members gaining elected seats as well as helping elect officials including former Governor Walter Pierce. Forced displacement has disproportionately targeted Black Portlanders through infamous mass displacement events such as the Vanport floods, the construction of the I5 Freeway, the construction of the Veteran Memorial Coliseum, and the construction of Legacy Emanuel Hospital, as well as through urban renewal initiatives that continue to this day. Black Oregonians make up only 2.4% of the population, according to the US Census, and even in Portland, the largest and most diverse city in the state, that number is only 5.8%. Meanwhile, according to FiveThirtyEight, Portland has the fifth highest Black arrest disparity in the country and Portland police kill Black people nearly four times more often than white people. Even in cities with considerable privilege, such as Lake Oswego, Black residents report constant discrimination that hinders opportunities and disproportionately negatively affects their quality of life, all while the city is known throughout the state by the nickname "Lake No Negro."

Creating a task force to "study and develop proposals for financial and nonfinancial reparations for Oregonians of African-American descent, develop appropriate methods for educating the public about the task force's findings and recommend appropriate remedies based on the task force's findings" is necessary to address the systemic inequities targeting Black Oregonians. It is both a matter of justice and creating an Oregon where all its residents can thrive and make the state the best version of itself.

In 2022, the Legislature passed HB 4052 which declared racism a public health crisis. According to the Oregon Public Health Association, "Racism causes harm,

trauma, illness, and death to Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) Oregonians. While HR 6, which Declared Racism a Public Health Crisis, passed during the 2021 legislative session we must take strategic actions to support this declaration. LC 238, like HR 6, acknowledges that Oregon's very founding as a state was rooted in racist ideals, and while the Black exclusionary laws are no longer on the books, the damaging impact of these and other racist policies continue to exist within our present-day policies and systems perpetuating health disparities. LC 238 calls for accelerated, intentional actions to heal these injustices and articulates strategies and investments to address health inequities."

HB 2995 directly addresses the strategies outlined in HB 4052, which are 1) Remove barriers to increase access and quality of care in BIPOC communities. 2) Meaningfully invest in community engagement to identify future strategies and 3) Develop recommendations to fund culturally specific programs.

I urge legislators to vote in support of HB 2995 so Oregon can take a necessary step toward repair and restoration for Black Oregonians. Your consideration is much appreciated.