

## **HB 2995**

Chair and Members of the Committee:

Today, I am writing testimony in my personal capacity as a Black Oregonian. I am in strong support of House Bill 2995, which would establish a Task Force on Reparations to study and develop proposals for addressing historical injustices faced by African American Oregonians. This task force represents a crucial step toward acknowledging and addressing the specific categories of harm outlined in the bill.

Oregon's history of systemic racism began with explicit exclusion laws. As documented by the Oregon State Archives, in June 1844, the Provisional Government passed the first Black exclusion law, requiring Black people to leave the territory within two years or face corporal punishment. When Oregon joined the Union in 1859, it was the only state admitted with an exclusion clause in its constitution (Article I, Section 35) that banned Black people from living, working, or owning property here – a clause that remained until voters removed it in 1926, though the racist language wasn't fully removed from the constitution until 2002.

The categories of systemic discrimination identified in HB 2995 have manifested throughout Oregon's history in specific, documented ways:

Regarding housing segregation and environmental racism, Portland's Albina district demonstrates how government policies systematically harmed Black communities. The Oregon State Archives documents that in the 1940s, Portland's Housing Authority explicitly segregated public housing, and the 1948 Vanport flood displaced the state's largest Black community with inadequate warning or evacuation plans. In the 1960s, the construction of Interstate 5 and the Memorial Coliseum displaced hundreds of Black families. Later, Emanuel Hospital's expansion further devastated this community, with many properties seized through eminent domain.

On education inequality, Oregon's history of segregated schools continued well into the 20th century. According to the Oregon State Archives chronology, in 1867, Portland created a separate school for Black students after community members protested white parents who kept their children home rather than have them attend school with Black students. The Portland School Board maintained officially segregated schools until 1947, and discriminatory practices persisted long after. Today, significant achievement gaps and disciplinary disparities continue to affect Black students in Oregon schools.

The wealth gap in Oregon has been perpetuated through decades of discriminatory lending practices. The Oregon State Archives records that in 1919, the Portland Realty Board adopted a rule declaring it unethical to sell property to Black and Asian people in white neighborhoods, institutionalizing housing discrimination in the state's largest city. The Homeowners' Loan Corporation's redlining maps explicitly designated Black neighborhoods as "hazardous" for investment, making it nearly impossible for Black Oregonians to secure mortgages. This

systematic denial of wealth-building opportunities continues to affect Black families today, with Black homeownership rates in Oregon remaining less than half those of white residents based on a 2021 report from Oregon Housing and Community Services.

Regarding labor and hindered opportunity, Oregon's history includes systematic exclusion of Black workers from unions and skilled trades. The Oregon State Archives documents that in 1945, after six failed attempts, the Oregon Legislature finally passed its first civil rights legislation outlawing discrimination in public places – though this did little to address entrenched economic discrimination. The 1945 Oregon Civil Rights Bill technically outlawed employment discrimination, but enforcement was minimal, and discriminatory hiring practices continued openly for decades.

The proposed task force would be positioned to:

- Document these historical injustices through comprehensive research
- Develop specific proposals for both financial and non-financial reparations
- Create educational initiatives to help all Oregonians understand this history
- Recommend concrete remedies based on documented harms for Black Oregonians
- Address ongoing systemic inequities in education, child welfare involvement employment, healthcare, and criminal justice

I urge you to support HB 2995. This task force would represent more than just a study commission – it would be a crucial first step toward acknowledging and addressing the specific, documented harms that state and local policies have inflicted on Black Oregonians.

Respectfully submitted,

Terrence J. Saunders,

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