

TRAVIS NELSON
STATE REPRESENTATIVE
HOUSE DISTRICT 44
NORTH/NORTHEAST PORTLAND



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Testimony in Support of House Bill 2995

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

For the record My name is Travis Nelson, and I am the State Representative for House District 44 - North and Northeast Portland. I am here today to urge your support for HB 2995. This is proposed legislation that establishes the Task Force on Reparations to study and develop proposals for financial AND nonfinancial remedies for the past and current injustices that have affected African American lives. This bill is more than just a study, but a necessary and overdue step toward achieving true equity in Oregon and an opportunity to make meaningful action to address the past injustices done the African Americans in our state.

Many of us know the history. Oregon was founded on exclusion. In 1844, the Provisional Government of Oregon passed the "Lash Law," banning Black people from settling and enforcing excruciating whippings for those who stayed. Even after the whipping penalty was removed in 1845, exclusionary laws persisted, and in 1857, Oregon's constitution explicitly prohibited Black people from living, owning property, or working in the state. These racist policies shaped Oregon's history, with exclusionary language remaining in the constitution until 1926, and the state delaying ratification of the 14th Amendment, the amendment that guaranteed citizenship to those born in the United States until 1973. This history has left a legacy of long-lasting inequities.

Even after these laws were formally repealed, Black communities, particularly in N and NE Portland, were subjected to redlining, housing discrimination, and displacement through urban renewal projects. We saw this during the Vanport flood of 1948, which disproportionately displaced Black families, to the Albina district's systematic divestment and gentrification. But to be clear, discrimination related housing was not exclusive to Portland. Across Oregon home covenants were common until the late 1960's. These agreements were part of the deal made when homes were sold and often included clauses that stated: "No Negroes, Chinese, or Japanese shall own or occupy property in this neighborhood unless they are a worker or a servant."

In summary, Oregon has a long history of racially driven economic disenfranchisement and exclusion, and the effects of this history still remain evident today. Black Oregonians continue to face stark disparities in homeownership, wealth accumulation, and access to healthcare. Disparities that HB 4052 and HB 2925 have already begun to address by recognizing racism as a public health crisis and gathering input from impacted communities. The 2022 report from HB 4052 included over 120 recommended policy changes aimed at eliminating racial disparities, with 15 of those already becoming policy proposals this session. That is progress, but it is only the beginning.

The reparations conversation is not just about acknowledging historical wrongs. It is about fully understanding what justice truly means and how we can do what is right. This task force represents an opportunity to deeply explore, once and for all, the lasting impacts of systemic exclusion and how we can meaningfully address them. We have the history, the lived experiences, and the undeniable evidence of ongoing disparities. If we are serious about dismantling systemic barriers and creating a more just Oregon, then we must take the next step forward. The past of Oregon and those who came before us do not define us, but the actions we take now with the knowledge we have of our past, forever will. I urge you to support HB 2995 so we can collectively move forward, together.

Thank you,

State Representative Travis Nelson
House District 44, North/NE Portland