

Submitter: Bob Rossi

On Behalf Of:

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

Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB2995

I am writing in support of HB 2995.

I am white, nearly 70 years old, male, working-class and with no college background. I spent most of my childhood in a small town of Southern transplants, Black and white, and the happiest years of my life in Appalachia and the South. My parents were blacklisted and forced to leave the town where they were living in Oklahoma in the early 1950s by a racist mob and a sheriff who threatened my father's life for doing what would today be considered benign racial justice work. I know racism, and I know racists. And no one who knows me considers me "woke."

I mention that by way of saying that there is absolutely nothing in the civil rights agenda or the movement for reparations that threatens or takes away anything that I have. Those efforts only add to my life, make it better, and give my life greater meaning. They get more people to the table, they give everyone a voice and something constructive to work for, and they give the hope that Oregon and our country can fulfill the expectations and promises described in our Constitution and laws. Without hope and law we have nihilism and chaos. My rights, civil liberties, and future depends on others.

There is a well-known history of oppression and discrimination in Oregon that needs to be addressed. There are smart and capable young people who deserve the chances that I didn't have, but in order for them to do better structures and support systems need to be in place that are not in place now. There are adults, people of color, who experience discrimination on the job, either through intentional ill-will or through passive and long-standing patterns of neglect. I have witnessed this and fought against this as a union representative. One state agency in particular comes to mind as I write this. That agency created a position to outreach to young people of color and made the appropriate hiring decision only to not provide needed support for that person and then to terminate them without good reason, and then repeated that process two more times as well.

What happens to people who live within the confines of a history that has not favored their parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents? What happens to youth who don't have a chance to advance, or who believe that they don't, based on past history? What happens to a worker who has not been supported in their dream job and terminated? If government cannot make people whole in one good and just move, at least the state can study these questions, create a social conversation

about real justice, develop solutions and remedial actions, bring voters along, and enact legislation that is driven by principles and requires results. Government should not be passive after generations of being complicit in discrimination and oppression. If our rights include the rights to ensure life, liberty, and the pursuits of wealth or happiness, and if these rights have been denied to anyone through racism and bigotry of any kind, then government logically inherits the responsibility of assuming an activist position and redressing injuries and deprivation.

Thank you.

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