

## **Personal Testimony of Racial Injustice and Discrimination HB 2995**

To whom it may concern,

My name is Courtney Bianca Cox, and I am reaching out to share my personal experiences with racial injustice and systemic discrimination. I was born in Hamilton County, Chattanooga, TN, and raised in Los Angeles, CA, before relocating to Oregon in 2021. My journey has been shaped by displacement due to the wildfires in Sonoma County, which led me to seek farmland with friends from California. Despite the loss of my home, I fought to rebuild my life, only to face further obstacles that have deeply impacted my mental, physical, and professional well-being.

In 2021, I moved to White Salmon, WA, in search of a farmland lease. Unfortunately, I was placed in a situation where I was expected to do the majority of the manual labor, pay full rent and utilities, and contribute my earnings to the property—conditions that felt like modern-day indentured servitude. Despite having invested my resources to move there, I left in search of more equitable circumstances.

I later moved to The Dalles, OR, where I faced racial discrimination at my job with Columbia Care Services. Despite excelling in my role, I was subjected to harassment from senior colleagues who sought to undermine me, forcing me to leave the position to protect my well-being. I experienced what is being known as, “office pet to office threat”. This experience underscores how political disenfranchisement and racial bias affect individuals in their professional lives.

My struggles continued when I relocated to Portland, where I have faced harassment from a neighbor named Barbie. This older white woman repeatedly called the police on me for sunbathing on the lawn, even though I was simply enjoying a peaceful moment on the property I rent. The police response, combined with ongoing racial slurs, led me to file reports with the Portland Police Bureau. However, the lack of support from property management forced me to endure continued harassment. This experience has left me feeling unsafe in my own home and has caused significant anxiety and distress.

I have also faced racial discrimination while working for the city. In July 2024, while in uniform, I was physically attacked and verbally harassed. The Portland Police Bureau has yet to provide any updates regarding this case. I regularly encounter racial slurs from the public and have been targeted for wearing a headwrap, yet my workers' compensation claim for work-related stress and harassment was denied, further compounding my stress and depleting my energy.

My experiences with systemic racism are not limited to employment. Growing up in California, I was wrongfully placed in special education from first to eighth grade, solely because of my race. At that time, Black students were frequently assigned to special education programs without justification, and it took years for families to file lawsuits to have their children retested. This placement set me back academically and professionally, contributing to a life-long sense of disenfranchisement.

Now, as a university student at Portland State University, I continue to struggle to make ends meet. In my 30s, I wish to return to farming but find myself unable to access housing or homeownership programs for farmland. I lack generational wealth and have faced systemic barriers that prevent me from pursuing my dreams and building stability. This is a stark example

of housing segregation, where Black individuals are systematically denied opportunities to build wealth and secure housing.

I share my story to shed light on the racial terror, political disenfranchisement, housing segregation, and mental and physical harm that many Black individuals continue to endure. These issues are compounded by racial bias in employment and advancement, and it is imperative that concrete action is taken to address them. I have experienced racialized harm in every aspect of life itself. It is so demoralizing, degrading, dehumanizing and down right unjust.

I urge you to:

1. **Eliminate racial bias in employment and advancement**, particularly for African Americans seeking public employment or promotion to higher-paying positions in government.

This can be done through funding CEU's, degrees and certifications for black folks.

Mentorship, and professional guidance and support for development.

2. **Ensure financial compensation** for those who have been harmed by discriminatory practices and provide free services to address the mental and physical health damage caused by racial discrimination.
3. **Support programs that enable Black individuals to thrive**, including loan repayment programs for those who have work experience in public service, free tuition for Black students, and assistance for first-time Black landowners seeking farmland.

**Overall, in the black community I believe some other things that would help is:**

- Free childcare. This childcare must be closely monitored and properly funded to ensure all receiving the service are enriched from the service and not harmed.
- Rent/ mortgage subsidies that stress the importance of a family unit, regardless of its configuration being inclusive of LGBTQI families and people who identify chosen family.
- Paid time off from work when racialized harm is committed and placing who decides what is racialized harm not in the hands of those who caused the harm. But rather a truly neutral educated and informed 3<sup>rd</sup> party, not HR.
- Workers compensation for cumulative and isolated instances of racialized harm and stress, especially from microaggressions.
- Free bus fare
- Stricter penalties for those who commit racialized harm at every level.
- -Free healthcare that covers holistic wellness.

While I believe all those on this land deserve these services and rights, and more, I believe Black, native and indigenous people should be prioritized. I also believe in the conversation around reparations we should not lose sight that we are all on stolen land. That the strides we have made, the rights I enjoy the rights that are so often violated and disregarded were earned through contributing to expansion out west, "Manifest Destiny", which is an interesting way to spell "genocide". I would advocate for all the harm done to all be addressed. That no one gets their justice at someone else's detriment.

I believe that the steps I've outlined would begin to address the systemic issues that have hindered not only my progress but the progress of countless others. I hope this testimony adds to the ongoing conversation about racial injustice and leads to tangible policy changes that can create real solutions.

While I am resilient, my ability to endure should not be mistaken for my acceptance of racialized harm. Enduring racism, on top of the challenges of daily life, is exhausting and draining. I haven't detailed every instance of racism I've experienced, simply because it's too much to recount. Holding individuals and institutions accountable for the racial harm they inflict requires time, effort, resources, and energy. If I tried to follow through on every instance, I would have no time for anything else. It would be a full-time job in itself.

Sadly, defending my right to live, work, and exist here as a Black woman in Oregon has become a burden, another task on a never-ending to-do list. It seems that, not long after one instance of racial harm occurs, another follows. The impact of these events becomes a contest of which one was the most harmful, yet I find myself with little capacity to pursue justice for every instance, especially while working full-time and navigating life as a single woman.

The overwhelming fatigue I feel—knowing that I am too exhausted to defend myself from racial harm—feels, in itself, like a form of racialized harm. Yet, despite this exhaustion, I am writing this testimony because, through all the hurt, I still have hope. I am guided by the faith that I, along with all other Black people, will receive justice—not in the form of empty words, but through meaningful, lasting change in the material conditions we face. This change can only be achieved by addressing the systemic discrimination that has been allowed to persist for far too long.

I leave this committee with the following quote: “Black faces in high places will not save us.” — Ruha Benjamin.

Why this is so important at this moment is that it's not simply about being Black. It's about the values of Blackness and the pursuit of justice that we are fighting for. Our struggle is not to see the face of the oppressor reflected in someone who looks like us. Rather, it's about challenging the systems that continues to uphold injustice, no matter who occupies positions of power.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Peace and Solidarity,  
-Cox