

Submitter: Cynthia Sawyer

On Behalf Of:

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

Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB2995

I respectfully oppose the proposed study of reparations specifically for African Americans in Oregon. Oregon's history with slavery is minimal; few ex-slaves migrated here during the pioneer movement. While systemic discrimination has occurred, it extends beyond slavery and affects multiple groups. A study focused solely on African American reparations risks misrepresenting this complex history.

African Americans faced economic harms from practices like redlining and loan denials, but these were not unique to them. Chinese immigrants endured exclusionary laws limiting property ownership, and Native Americans were displaced from their lands. If the goal is to address economic harm from discrimination, why limit the study to one group? Singling out African Americans could be seen as unfair and divisive.

Recently, affordable housing was built for Somali immigrants in Portland, while African Americans here struggle with affordability. This highlights the complexity of addressing current inequities. A narrow reparations study might increase tensions among minority groups rather than promote equitable solutions.

If an examination is the deep desire of the writers of this bill, I suggest a broader examination of historical discrimination in Oregon, including its impacts on all affected groups. This could inform policies promoting equity for all residents. Practical initiatives like education, housing, and economic development benefit everyone and address disparities more effectively. However, at this time when we should be promoting overall economic growth in Oregon as well as overall improvement of effective educational outcomes, going down the rabbit hole of reparations would be a waste of time and resources. All of the equity issues could be addressed by lifting up the economic and educational outlook for all Oregonians.

Thank you for considering my testimony.

