

Testimony on the Need for a Taskforce for Black Reparations in Oregon

Dear Members of the Legislative Body,

I stand before you today to advocate for the establishment of a dedicated taskforce focused on making recommendations for reparations for the Black community in Oregon. The systemic injustices faced by Black individuals and families in our state, as well as across the country, have left deep scars that continue to affect generations.

Oregon's history is marked by specific events that have been profoundly harmful to Black Oregonians and underscore the urgent need for reparative measures:

1. ****Exclusionary Policies and the 1844 Black Exclusion Law****: Oregon was one of the first states to enact laws explicitly excluding Black individuals from settling within its borders. The 1844 law mandated that Black people be whipped if they were found in the territory. This exclusion set a precedent for systemic racism and discrimination, creating a social environment hostile to Black individuals.
2. ****The Vanport Flood of 1948****: Vanport was a wartime housing project that housed thousands of Black workers during World War II. After the flood destroyed the community, many residents were displaced, and the city did not provide adequate support for their relocation. This tragedy highlighted the vulnerability of Black communities and their lack of representation in recovery efforts.
3. ****Discriminatory Practices in Housing and Employment****: Throughout the 20th century, Black Oregonians faced redlining, discriminatory lending practices, and employment discrimination. For instance, the Portland Housing Authority restricted access to housing for Black families, contributing to long-lasting segregation and economic disparity.
4. ****The 1960s Civil Rights Movement****: While the Civil Rights Movement aimed to address racial injustices, Oregon's response was often inadequate. Many Black citizens fought tirelessly for equal rights, yet systemic barriers remained. The struggle for civil rights in Oregon was met with pushback and violence, further entrenching racial divides.
5. ****Recent Incidents of Racial Violence and Discrimination****: In recent years, incidents such as the violence against peaceful protesters and the rise of hate crimes against Black individuals in our state have illustrated that systemic racism is not just a relic of the past but a current reality that demands our attention and action.

These historical events illustrate a pattern of exclusion, discrimination, and violence that has deeply impacted Black communities in Oregon. A dedicated taskforce would ensure that the voices of those most affected are centered in the conversation about reparations. It would be uniquely positioned to identify specific needs and make tailored recommendations, ensuring that reparations are not only symbolic but also substantive and impactful.

Establishing such a taskforce would demonstrate Oregon's commitment to justice and equity. It would send a powerful message that we recognize the wrongs of the past and are dedicated to making amends. This is not merely a matter of financial compensation; it is about acknowledging the hurt, rebuilding trust, and creating pathways for opportunity and prosperity for Black communities.

In conclusion, the creation of a taskforce to recommend reparations for Black Oregonians is an essential step towards rectifying historical injustices and fostering a more equitable future. By investing in this initiative, we can begin to heal and work towards a society where all individuals, regardless of their background, can thrive.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.