

Testimony of Dr. Roberta Hunte

Chair Reynolds and members of the Senate Committee on Early Childhood and Behavioral Health,

My name is Dr. Roberta Suzette Hunte, I am a researcher and associate professor at Portland State University in Multnomah County, specializing in maternal health disparities and community based interventions. I lead a small collective of birth justice advocates and birthworkers called Black Futures for Perinatal Health, and am a member of the Oregon Perinatal Collaborative steering committee. I am a mother who has experienced postpartum preeclampsia and knows the necessity of patient centered care.

I came in contact with OPC in the fall of 2020. I presented at their conference on issues related to improving Black maternal health care in Oregon.

- Black infants are twice as likely to die before their first birthday as white infants.
- Black women are three times more likely to die from pregnancy-related causes than white women, regardless of income or education level.
- For Black women, increasing education and income does not lower their risk—it actually increases it, due to the cumulative impact of systemic racism, also known as “weathering,” which prematurely ages the body and worsens birth outcomes.

At OPC I met practitioners and researchers from across the state committed to improving maternal and child care. I have worked with them around maternal health policy ever since. OPC brings together people working in birth centers, hospitals, community care organizations, non-profits, and public health. Their reach is broad and elevates the quality of care for all. Racial and regional disparities persist in terms of preterm birth and infant mortality. Clinics are strained across the state. The work of OPC is vital and seeks to address service gaps. The work of OPC and its

members is critical to maintaining that grade and improving birth outcomes in the state. Please vote yes on Senate bill 1039. Thank you.

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