

Senate Committee on Health Care

Chair Patterson, Vice Chair Hayden and members of the Senate Health Care Committee,

Ran Anim Senators, which is a greeting in my native Chuukese Language. My name is David Bernard, and I am writing this note to you to let you know how much we at CANN Oregon appreciate you for sponsoring SB 442. I am the Chairman of the board for CANN Oregon, which is a 501 (c)3 non-profit that works in Oregon only. The organization started by delivering wrap-around services (rent, food and utility relief) under the Covid Relief Act of 2021 and then continued assisting COFA people who were ineligible for safety net benefits. CANN Oregon is rather unique among the COFA-based non-profits, as its mission is focused on all the COFA communities in Oregon, rather than those from one particular country.

When I think about the difficulty my COFA brothers and sisters have with negotiating and understanding the health and food benefits they are now eligible for under the most recent Compact agreement, I am dismayed. I am reminded of the challenges my people encountered when traveling 100 miles or more between their islands with no compasses or GPS, but dependent solely on reading the sun, moon, stars, and the littoral drift of the waves. This level of difficulty of navigation is consistent with what my fellow COFA citizens are encountering when they are attempting to gain access to the programs they are eligible for. There are cultural differences, language barriers, program compliance differences that are all very confusing without a trained navigator. This is why the people need a central access point for information, assistance and education in their native languages.

Up to this point, money has been provided to Non-profits in Oregon to assist with the provision of basic assistance and to help with applications for assistance. While I am chair of one such Non-profits, I am acutely aware of the limitations of such a plan in the special environment of Island communities in Oregon when it comes to access to the network in OHA that could allow us to address barriers on a daily basis that prevent us from doing some of our work on the ground. Our people frequently require follow up and ongoing assistance rather than one-shot one stop help, such as enrolling them to get the insurance card. Furthermore, many of the non-profits are geographically oriented to assist people from only one of the three COFA countries. These are some of the reasons that the wonderful financial assistance from the state has not yielded the results that were hoped for. It is simply unrealistic for the nonprofit assistor system to fill all these navigational health care challenges that people continually face. It's not just we nonprofits can't reach everybody, it's that they need an office to call to get assistance from with help provided in their spoken language, whether it's a health, housing or food assistance issue.

An office in the state government would be able to assist people on an ongoing basis with accessing, utilizing and maintaining the social safety net services. It can provide education about best use of healthcare and how to keep up with the monitoring demands of each program. It could have access to language-specific, culturally appropriate assistance. It would have more stable funding. It could build on previous work with a universal vision rather than a project-by-project mindset.

As I think about the long journey that my COFA brothers and sisters have made while navigating from our home Islands to Oregon and the difficulties we have encountered in gaining equal access to life saving benefits, I am humbled to know there are people like you, who are hearing our pleas.

You have gained a special place in our hearts, so I simply want to say, Kinisou Chapur (Thank you very much) for being in the boat with us. The land separates us but the ocean brings us together.

Kind regards,

David Bernard

President, COFA Alliance National Network of Oregon Chapter

Email: lemелanglekin@yahoo.com | Dbernard@CANN.US

Phone: 503-851-5593