

---

## Oregon Commission on Asian and Pacific Islander Affairs

### TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SENATE BILL 442

#### *Establishing the COFA Shared Services Office*

March 7, 2025

Honorable Members of the Oregon Legislature,

The Oregon Commission on Asian and Pacific Islander Affairs (OCAPIA) respectfully submits this testimony in strong support of Senate Bill 442, which would establish the COFA Shared Services Office within the Oregon Department of Human Services and the Oregon Health Authority.

As the state commission tasked with identifying and addressing barriers facing Asian and Pacific Islander communities, we recognize the unique challenges confronting citizens from the Republic of the Marshall Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, and the Republic of Palau who reside in Oregon under the Compact of Free Association (COFA).

#### **Why This Legislation Matters**

Despite their legal status to live and work in the United States, COFA citizens face significant systemic barriers accessing healthcare, housing, employment services, and other critical resources. The stark disparity is evident in the underutilization of benefits—last year, only seventeen COFA community members in Oregon accessed dental care services, despite having eligibility for these benefits. That is **only seventeen individuals** out of the roughly **9,000 COFA migrants residing in Oregon**

The March 2024 COFA Amendments expanded access to federal and state programs, yet without structured support, these communities continue to encounter obstacles including language barriers, complex application processes, and a lack of culturally appropriate services. This legislation addresses these challenges through a coordinated, centralized approach.

#### **Alignment with OCAPIA's Statutory Duties**

Senate Bill 442 directly aligns with OCAPIA's core duties under ORS 185.620, particularly our responsibility to:

- Identify barriers to economic development for Asian and Pacific Islander Americans
- Compile information on available services across sectors
- Assess programs serving these communities and recommend improvements
- Identify and examine the needs of Asian and Pacific Islander residents



### **Key Benefits of the COFA Shared Services Office**

The proposed office would:

1. Provide direct assistance with applications for medical, housing, nutrition, and employment benefits
2. Conduct culturally appropriate outreach in relevant languages
3. Award grants to community organizations providing culturally specific services
4. Support the recruitment of traditional health workers qualified to deliver culturally specific care
5. Create a centralized resource hub for information and services

This office would not replace the valuable work of community-based organizations but would strengthen the entire ecosystem of support by addressing systemic barriers and ensuring equitable access to services throughout Oregon.

### **Recommendation**

OCAPIA strongly urges the Legislature to approve Senate Bill 442. This legislation represents a meaningful commitment to equity for COFA communities and fulfills Oregon's obligation to align state policies with federal commitments to these sovereign nations. The establishment of this office will create accountability and provide the intentional, systemic support needed to ensure COFA citizens can fully access the rights and benefits they are entitled to receive.

Respectfully submitted,  
Oregon Commission on Asian and Pacific Islander Affairs

