



Members of the Ways and Means General Government Committee, my name is Midge Purcell, Director of Advocacy and Public Affairs, Urban League of Portland. I would like to share some thoughts for consideration as you deliberate the Oregon Advocacy Commissions budget.

The Commissions are a consistent voice for underrepresented communities and the only statutory voice in State Government focused on equity. They provide critical advice for the Governor and legislators on policy issues affecting communities of color and women. Communities of color are growing rapidly and consistently throughout the state. The 2010 census showed that Oregon's communities of color are now more than 20% of the population, and are represented in every county in the state. The Commission, including the Commission on Black Affairs, provide a statewide reach and capacity for statewide engagement that few other African American organizations can replicate. The Commissions also provide a formalized partnership between government and advocacy organizations which opens a direct door to policy tables for our communities.

The Commission on Black Affairs and the Urban League has continued a valued partnership. Our joint efforts include regular legislative updates, joint advocacy on key issues of concern to our community, and co-sponsorship of annual Legislative Advocacy Days, which this year brought over 200 people to the Capitol. The partnership that the Urban League of Portland has formed with the Commission has helped us to unite and amplify the voice of African American organizations around the state.

There is still much work to be done in addressing racial disparities in Oregon. Our ongoing research reveals that Black unemployment is almost 21%, and the median income of black headed households was less than 2/3s that of White households—a gap that remained unchanged since 1990. Recent data shows that nearly 30% of African American, Latino and Native Americans live in poverty. The figures are even more severe for children. There are equally unacceptable disparities in health outcomes and in educational achievement. These are startling numbers and outcomes that we cannot afford to ignore if we are to prosper and remain globally competitive as a state.

I hope you will continue funding for a two person office that supports the work of the four Commissions in the Oregon Advocacy Commissions (Asian, Black, Hispanic Affairs and Commission for Women). The staff ensures that the Commissions can build their partnerships, coordinate events, and prepare legislative updates, policy briefings and other supports. We need to fully fund the Oregon Advocacy Commissions Office and the important work it does.

I urge your support of the Oregon Advocacy Commissions. They are the advocates of the protected classes and we cannot afford to ignore the issues that Oregon's communities of color face every day.