



**Testimony of Becky Straus, Legislative Director
In Support of HB 2134
House Health Care Committee
February 15, 2013**

Chair Greenlick and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments in support of HB 2134. Over the past few months, we have been working with APANO and its Data Equity Coalition. We support their efforts to improve the practice of race and ethnicity data collection by the Oregon Health Authority (OHA) and the Department of Human Services (DHS).

Lessons in Data Collection

Because of our ongoing work to implement similar best practices at the Department of Education (ODE), we hope that our perspective will provide unique insight into the issues and the goals. A key pre-requisite to addressing educational inequities is the collection and evaluation of accurate demographic data. Quite obviously, if the data is too general, misleading, or incorrect, the conclusions that result will be meaningless. Best practices for accurate data collection include self-identification of racial and ethnic origin as opposed to identification by an observer/caseworker, and options to identify with more than one race or ethnicity that does not default to a general designation as “multi-racial.” The consequence of inaccurate data collection can be immediate and measurable, including loss of funding for vital programs to address inequities and policy changes that are not targeted to meet the most pressing student needs.

Your support of HB 2134 can import some of these lessons into delivery of public assistance. If we as a state can become smarter about what demographic data we collect and the protocol for doing so, we can better position ourselves to understand racial and ethnic disparities in health and wellbeing of Oregonians.

Note of Caution re Privacy

The Dash 1 amendment proposes to include “disability status” in the data collection policies of the agencies. Collection of this data could be done in a way that both protects the privacy of the public assistance recipient and provides accurate and beneficial data in this area. To the extent that it is the intent of the proponents to achieve both of these goals in the rulemaking process and in the implementation of any resulting policy, we are supportive of the Dash 1.

Thank you for your consideration of this important issue. HB 2134 is a modest step toward providing the state and the public the tools they need to accurately address inequities in Oregon. We hope you will move the bill on to the House floor.

Please feel free to contact me at any time with comments or questions.