

Cultural Competence is a Net savings to the system

Chair Greenlick and members of the committee, for the record my name is Ty Schwaeffer from Portland I represent (Organization) Urban League of Portland

I am testifying in support of the HB 2611.

On Tuesday night Oregonians proudly watched as Governor John Kitzhaber sat in the presence of the elegant first lady Michelle Obama as the President delivered his State of the Union speech. We all know how hard we have all been working on addressing the growing cost of health care and for that Gov. Kitzhaber received national recognition by sitting in the first lady's guest box on Tuesday. However, we know that there is much more work to be done to rein in health care costs. We cannot lose sight of the opportunity to add cultural competence training as a cost reduction strategy.

National estimates show that half of the 4 million newly eligible Medicaid and Medicare recipients will be Black and Latino. A report produced by the *Healthcare Cost and Utilization Project* and the *Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies* in 2011 estimated Racial and Ethnic disparities had a cost to the nation of \$1.24 Trillion (repeat) between 2003-2006. Cultural competence has been identified by the National Center for Disease Control and the American Public Health Association as a one of the proven strategies to reduce healthcare costs and eliminate health disparities.

Health professionals trained in cultural competence have an increased rate of accurate diagnosis according to studies. Health professionals need the skills necessary to elicit patients' understanding of illness and sickness. A great example of this can be read in the book *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down* by Anne Fadiman which chronicles one Hmong refugee family from Laos in California and their experiences with the health care system. Health care professionals have been building a body of knowledge of cultural practices and the perceptions of health care, yet there are still no requirements for health care providers to study any of this valuable research. This can lead to a duplication of services and unnecessary emergency room visits.

I urge you to support the *Cultural Competency is Just good healthcare movement* as part health care transformation and a key cost savings strategy. Doctors and other health care workers should be required to have training in cultural competency, so that together we can begin to remove barriers to good health care and together we can build a healthier Oregon while we lower costs.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. I would be happy to answer any questions.