



Asian Pacific American Network of Oregon

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March 6, 2015

Oregon Legislature  
House Health Committee

**RE: Yes on HB 2934**

Dear Chair Greenlick and Members of the Committee,

Thank you Chair Greenlick and members of the Committee. I am the Rev. Joseph Santos-Lyons, Executive Director of APANO, the Asian Pacific American Network of Oregon or APANO.

Today our Asian and Pacific Islander communities are some of the fastest growing in Oregon and the Country, and while there are pockets of prosperity, many of our communities continue to face barriers to opportunity. Today there are over 220,000 Asian and Pacific Islanders in Oregon, who predominately live and work in the Willamette Valley.

APANO has been deeply engaged with our communities who continue to experience uninsurance and the consequences of acquiring affordable, culturally competent health care. Through the transition to CCO and the enrollment through Cover Oregon, we have seen many positive steps taken that have improved our health care system. And we have identified gaps which with your help, we can address.

We support HB 2934 because an Oregon Basic Health Program has the potential to eliminate disparities in two populations who are excluded from the Oregon Health Plan. These are the Pacific Islanders from Marshall Islands, Palua and Micronesia who have emigrated to the US as a result of our ongoing military interests in their home countries, seeking education and health services. And legal permanent residents who face the federal 5 year waiting period for medicaid, a significant portion of whom are Asian and Pacific Islanders.

Like many communities, our Asian and Pacific Islander communities are deeply connected to our families. One of our values is around having our family be together. Asian and Pacific Islanders have immigrated to the US and Oregon for many reasons, and share some common reasons why. We are



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here, because you were there. Oregon's largest waves of Asian and Pacific Islander immigration has been as a result of the military and economic interventions into our home countries.

As our families work to reunite with their loved ones, with their children, parents, and grandparents, there are some situations where these families face the hardships of job loss and poverty. This is a reality that affects all Oregonians. Yet in our communities we face additional barriers that a Basic Health Plan may address.

An Oregon Basic Health program may provide access with federal support for those who are currently ineligible. This includes an estimated 7,000 Legal Permanent Residents and COFA Oregonians. We see a viable path to providing health care to these Oregonians with no impact to the state budget.

We believe all Oregonians should have equal access to health care. We believe HB 2934 to be a measured step toward achieving the Triple Aim and benefiting all Oregonians. Thank you for your time and commitment to the health and social equity of all Oregonians. Thank you for your support of HB 2934.

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## **Pacific Islander Disparities in Oregon**

However, many Pacific Islanders face extreme hardships disproportionate to their population. For example, Pacific Islanders in Oregon are three times as likely as their white peers to be unemployed; twice as likely to be an adult without a secondary education and pregnant women are twice as likely to go without 1st trimester prenatal care and deliver children with a low birth weight.

## **About COFA**

The Compact of Free Association, or COFA, is a treaty between the United States and three PI nations: the Republic of Palau (ROP), Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) and Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI). Held in trust by the United States after WWII, the U.S. agreed to "protect [island] inhabitants against the loss of their lands". Instead, the United States detonated 67 nuclear and atomic bombs, the size of which equates to 7,200 Hiroshima detonations, the result of which incinerated upwards of 6 islands atolls. These three treaties allow COFA residents to legally live and



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work in the U.S. without a visa, commit the U.S. to administering annual aid to their nations and allow for the continued military occupation of their land and waters until 2066.

As a result of nuclear fallout, COFA populations are more likely than their Pacific Islander peers to experience radiogenic diseases, have abnormally high rates of TB, obesity, diabetes and high-blood pressure.

Oregon is home to the 5th largest COFA population in the nation, of which the Marshallese community is most dominant. In fact, Marshallese is the third most common language spoken in Salem-Keizer schools.

However, Oregon is one of few states with a large COFA population that does not currently provide health care for these residents through Medicaid.

