



**Urban League
of Portland**

Joint Ways and Means, General Government Committee
March 23, 2015

RE: Testimony on Funding for the Oregon Advocacy Commissions Office

Co -Chairs Sen. Steiner Hayward and Rep. Greg Smith and Members of the Committee, my name is Midge Purcell, Director of Advocacy and Public Affairs, Urban League of Portland. On behalf of the Urban League, we urge your continued support for Oregon Advocacy Commissions.

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 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 last full session year brought over 200 people to the Capitol and is scheduled this year for April 29th. 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 State of Black Oregon report will shortly be released and show while there has been some progress Black unemployment is still more than double that of the general population 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. 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 staffing levels 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. I urge your support of the Oregon Advocacy Commissions. They are the advocates of our protected classes and we cannot afford to ignore the issues that Oregon's women and communities of color face every day.