To: House Committee on Healthcare
From: Oregon Health Equity Alliance
Date: February 9th 2015
Re: HB 2522

Chair Greenlick, Members of the Committee:

The Oregon Health Equity Alliance (OHEA) would like to express our support for HB 2522. OHEA represents a collective effort of 37 member organizations who work together to make Oregon a more equitable place for all. Our coalition believes every Oregonian should have an equal chance to achieve their full health potential, and that is why we are supporting HB 2522.

HB 2522 creates an Islander Health Coverage Gap Assessment Office in Oregon Health Authority, to promote access to health care for island citizens residing in United States under Compact of Free Association (COFA). These citizens have a unique immigration relationship with the United States. They have allowed the U.S. Military to occupy their land and sea territory in exchange for security and long term restitution for health and environmental damages. For over 60 years, the U.S. has performed atomic nuclear testing and ballistic missile exercises, displacing families and damaging the economy.

COFA citizens find it a struggle to receive assistance while in the United States. COFA workers, legally allowed to work in the U.S., pay taxes but are barred from receiving public assistance. Additionally, those seeking educational opportunities in the U.S. are barred from receiving federal loans, and are only eligible for Pell Grant. This is especially troubling as many COFA live under 138% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) and cannot afford health insurance, even with state subsidies. A lack of disaggregated data makes invisible the struggle of COFAs both in Oregon and the greater country; it is this invisibility that highlights the failure to fulfill our commitment to the health and education of our immigrant neighbors.

OHEA urges your full support of HB 2522. Thank you for your commitment to our communities.

Joseph Santos-Lyons, APANO, OHEA co-Chair
Midge Purcell, Urban League of Portland, OHEA co-Chair