

Remarks to: House Committee on Health Care, February, 1, 2016

Mr. Chair Greenlick, Vice Chair Nosse, Vice Chair Hayden, and members of the Healthcare Committee. Iakwe (Greetings). My name is David Kona Anitok, President for the Oregon Marshallese Community and an active member of the COFA Alliance National Network (CANN). I have been a resident of Salem, Oregon since 2006; along with my wife, Lucinda and our 3 children.

First, I would like to thank you Mr. Chair Greenlick and members of the Committee, for providing me the opportunity to speak to you on the first day of the 2016 session. It's an honor to be here today to share with you the urgent need for equality of health care for all Compact of Free Association (COFA) families in Oregon. Mr. Chair Greenlick and members of the Committee, before you is the report that resulted in the passage of HB 2522 last session on which DCBS and the stakeholder advisory committee worked so diligently. I am grateful to have been involved in the advisory committee, and stand firmly in support of this report.

Mr. Chair and members of the committee, 30 years ago, in 1986, the Compact of Free Association treaty granted us the right to come here legally. COFA families came to Oregon in search of a better future for their children: opportunities in education, in jobs, in raising their families, and most importantly, to obtain equality in health care. As you know, we live and work, pay local, state, and federal taxes in Oregon, yet in 1996, 10 years after this unique treaty, we were banned from Medicaid due to the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act. Many COFA individuals suffer from diseases caused by radiation from nuclear testing or long term radioactive contamination of their land. Without Medicaid, COFA families have been put in the position of having to go to emergency rooms or community clinics for medical treatment, or not to go at all.

Now, I am here before you, pleading for your support to correct this injustice regarding Healthcare Equality for COFA families, a violation of human rights. To quote one of our great leaders from the islands, and former Foreign Affairs minister to the Marshall Islands, Mr. Tony deBrum during his acceptance speech of the 2015 Right Livelihood Award in Stockholm: "We may be poor, we may be brown, we may come from a small remote island that many struggle to find on the map. But we should not have been ignored". Kommol tata and thank you.

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