



ASIAN PACIFIC AMERICAN NETWORK OF OREGON

February 1, 2016

Chair Greenlick, Vice Chairs, and members of the Committee:

The Asian Pacific American Network of Oregon (APANO) is a grassroots, statewide organization uniting communities to achieve social justice. We leverage the collective strength of our 7,000 members to advance equity through empowering, organizing and advocating with our communities.

We write to request your support of HB 4071.

As you know, Micronesians, Palauans, and the Marshallese are Pacific Islanders from freely associated states. They are legally permitted to reside and work in the United States in exchange for the ongoing military use of their territories. This relationship began in the 1940s and is known as the Compact of Free Association (COFA). The foundation of this living legacy is rooted in the United States' nuclear weapons testing program and the related health effects of these actions as experienced by COFA Pacific Islanders. For instance, COFA Pacific Islanders experience breast and liver cancer rates that are five and three times higher, respectively, than the general public. Researchers have found COFA Pacific Islanders suffer from heart disease, diabetes, among other chronic health conditions at alarmingly high rates.

In 1996 COFA Pacific Islanders were barred from federal public benefit services including Medicaid, through the passage of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act. As a result, many COFA Pacific Islanders are likely to be uninsured, are unable to afford necessary prescriptions, and many not have a primary care physician.

Oregon is home to the third largest COFA population in the continental United States. Yet unlike other states, Oregon does not extend state-funded coverage to our COFA residents and the insurance gap remains unremedied. We estimate 1,500 COFA Pacific Islanders are income-eligible for the Oregon Health Plan (OHP) but do not qualify for the program due to their unique immigration status.

APANO was a fervent supporter of COFA Pacific Islanders' fight for coverage during the 2015 legislative session. We, alongside the COFA Alliance National Network, community members, and insurers, worked with DCBS throughout the advisory group process. We praise this process as thorough, well managed and community-driven. The product of the advisory group is a premium assistance program that could deliver cost-parity to OHP for 1,500 COFA enrollees.

Our Marshallese, Palauan and Micronesian neighbors have waited twenty years for affordable coverage. The Committee has an opportunity to deliver relief through the remaining biennium. We urge your support for HB 4071.

Regards,
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Asian Pacific American Network of Oregon