

Health Department

February 1, 2016

House Health Care Committee
900 Court St. NE- HR E
Salem, Oregon 97301

Re: HB 4071-Health Coverage for COFA Islanders

Dear Chair Greenlick and Members of the House Health Care Committee,

This letter is being written in support of HB 4071. For the past few decades Multnomah County has been home to thousands of legally residing immigrant families who are citizens of the three Micronesian countries known collectively as the Compact of Free Association countries (COFA). COFA islanders together with other Pacific Islanders are the fastest growing immigrant group in Multnomah County. COFA islanders are thriving members of our community who contribute to the diversity and strength of our State.

Despite being hardworking and taxpaying members of our community COFA citizens suffer significant socioeconomic and health disparities due to being categorically barred from Medicaid (OHP) as well as other federal safety net programs which are critical to the health and well-being of low income families. The lack of access to healthcare and especially preventive healthcare increases the prevalence of health disparities for COFA islanders. This lack of healthcare access often drives COFA families to the emergency department for their medical care which results in costly bills for families and impacts medical costs for the entire community. This lack of regular medical care also can cause early deaths from chronic and preventable diseases.

Multnomah County fully supports HB4071 which proposes the creation of the COFA Premium Assistance Program. This innovative program would provide healthcare access to low-income COFA families in the State. This would be a step forward in correcting this injustice and promote health equity in our community. Families from the Compact of Free Association countries should be given access to health coverage so that they can receive basic health services and achieve good health.

Thank you for your consideration and if you have any questions please contact me at 503 988-5599.

Sincerely,



Joanne Fuller M.S.W., Director
Multnomah County Health Department
426 SW Stark St, 8th Floor
Portland, OR 97204
joanne.fuller@multco.us