



COFA Alliance National Network
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Co-Chairs, Johnson and Gomberg and members of the Committee, my name is Loyd Henion and I am here today representing the COFA Alliance National Network, or CANN. The mission of CANN is to "promote and achieve social and economic justice for the legal residents living in Oregon from three Island nations, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, the Republic of Palau, and the Federated States of Micronesia (Pohnpei, Kosrae, and Yap). COFA stands for "Compact of Free Association", which is the name of the treaty the US has with all three nations.

CANN has been working with the legislature, state agencies and partnering allies for the last four years on passing laws that address the inequities that have prevented the COFA people from living freely among us. This legislative body has responded like no other in the US and has improved the livability of these people significantly by passing a driver license bill in 2013 which allows for an 8-year term just like the rest of us. Then in 2016, HB 4071 was enacted to allow for Medicaid-like coverage for the first time since the Welfare Reform Act was passed in 1996. I would like to mention the professionalism of staff of DCBS in administering this program.

I want to express to you today the amazement, joy and gratitude that has been communicated to me from members of the COFA community. Having been unable to obtain safety-net health benefits for 20 years has really been a disadvantage for this group, especially considering that health benefits are increasingly difficult to obtain through employment OR prohibitively expensive when it is offered. They are amazed that the Oregon legislature voted unanimously to pass HB 4071. They are joyful that healthcare coverage means that they can obtain treatment for acute and chronic diseases without losing ground financially. They are grateful to you for responding to their plight and seeking to relieve their burden.

Taking into consideration the cancers and endocrine disorders like diabetes and hypothyroidism, as well as the heart disease that is endemic in this population as a result of the nuclear bomb testing done in the Marshall Islands in the 1950's, assistance with healthcare costs is a well-deserved gift for these people. They are grateful for the will of the legislature to give that gift.

As an elderly Marshallese man stated in his testimony to the Ways and Means Committee:

"I have six children. I am very grateful for the COFA program because now, for the first time, we are able to see doctors...we are very grateful because this is the only place, here in Salem, Oregon, that we can find this quality care."

I think that it is possible that the smaller programs with the smaller pricetags look like the easiest ones to cut from the budget. Yet I believe that the COFA Assistance Program is like the mustard seed in the parable. Great rewards can be obtained from relatively small input.

Mending the harm that has been done to this population is no small matter. Paraphrasing, Neil Armstrong, for the COFA population in Oregon to get meaningful healthcare may be thought of as "One Small Step", but it represents a "Giant Leap" for this legislature to demonstrate to the rest of the country that we take responsibility for ALL our residents.

So I urge this body to continue the funding of the COFA Premium Assistance Program.

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