



House Committee on Health Care  
Re: HB 4133, Maternal Mortality and Morbidity Review Committee

February 9, 2018

Chair Greenlick and fellow committee members,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today in support of HB 4133 to establish a maternal mortality and review committee. My name is Jenny Lee, and I am the Advocacy Director at the Coalition of Communities of Color, a coalition of 19 culturally-specific organizations dedicated to cross-cultural, collective action for racial equity. The Coalition of Communities of Color's mission is to address the socioeconomic disparities, institutional racism, and inequity of services experienced by our families, children and communities; and to organize our communities for collective action resulting in social change to obtain self-determination, wellness, justice and prosperity.

No woman should die because of a pregnancy complication, and women of color are at particular risk. For African-American women in the United States, the maternal mortality rate disparities cut across age, education, and income level. Racial inequities in the social determinants of health including housing, food, education, economic stability, and environmental conditions all influence health outcomes. Yet disparities in maternal mortality cannot be explained only by these social determinants of health because for black women, the maternal mortality rate cuts across age, income, and health. Unconscious bias and discrimination in health care treatment also play a role. Among the 200 stories that NPR and ProPublica collected from African-American mothers, a feeling of being devalued and disrespected in health was a constant theme and impacts the quality of care. Chronic stress from the experiences of being an African-American woman in the US is also implicated in these health disparities and their impact on maternal health. Understanding how these deaths and disparities occur in Oregon is imperative for the wellbeing of families of color.

We would like to note the importance of having a representative from a community-based organization that is able to bring an understanding of the experiences of mothers of color in health care. We also note that the review committee must take into consideration the lived experiences of women of color and the impacts of institutional racism and implicit bias in social determinants of health and health care. And looking beyond the establishment of this committee, we point out that the policy solutions ultimately developed need to be based in the community, with the people most impacted present at the decision-making table and providing assessments of these policies.

Oregon must take action to understand and address the reasons behind maternal deaths, including racial disparities, now. On behalf of the Coalition of Communities of Color, I respectfully urge you to establish a maternal mortality and morbidity review committee.

Thank you,  
Jenny Lee  
On Behalf of the Coalition of Communities of Color

