
Planned Parenthood Advocates of Oregon

June 23, 2020

Co-Chairs Courtney and Kotek and Members of the Joint Interim Committee on the First Special Session of 2020,

As we confront the COVID-19 pandemic, which is disproportionately ravaging Black communities, we must address the public health crisis that racism presents. Public health by definition is built on the principle of saving lives. There has been no greater threat to Black lives than the violence being inflicted at the hands of the state — through the blatant violence inflicted by police and through centuries of policy that have systematically oppressed Black people since before the founding of our country.

We commend the Oregon legislature's People of Color Caucus for their call to action regarding police accountability, including proposing legislation. Our elected leaders have a duty to address police accountability and reforms that protect communities from police violence, and we appreciate the legislature and Governor Brown's sense of urgency to begin that work as soon as possible. The work to dismantle the structural and systemic racism inherent within our institutions will extend beyond just one moment in time or one legislative session. That critical work requires an inclusive and thorough process that meaningfully engages and partners with the Black, Indigenous, and People of Color communities and Black-led and Black-serving organizations from start to finish. To that end, we ask that the legislature consider the feedback that Black community leaders and advocates have provided on the proposed legislation on police accountability.

Planned Parenthood Advocates of Oregon signed onto two letters alongside many other community-based, labor, and advocacy organizations, including Unite Oregon, PAALF, and the Urban League, requesting that the state commit to partnering with the Black community and policy experts in bringing systemic changes to public safety. We ask that the legislature enact that commitment by contributing state funding to a community-led effort to reimagine safety in Oregon communities. We ask that the legislature join other government jurisdictions in providing this proposed policy table with the necessary time, resources, and access to state policy and legal expertise so they can develop a community-driven long term plan that addresses the deeply entrenched structural racism within our policing and carceral systems. In addition to adequately resourcing and supporting this community-led effort, we ask that the legislature also commit to actively legislating the findings of that table.

As an organization dedicated to protecting and expanding reproductive freedom, we have been looking at the ways in which policing deepens inequitable health outcomes across race and class. Racism permeates every structure in our society. It is in our workplaces, our schools, our healthcare system, and our public institutions, such as police departments. The policing of Black bodies makes the promise of reproductive freedom unattainable for Black people in this country. If Black people do not have the right to bodily autonomy to live their daily lives — or protest the violence against their lives — without the fear of violence or murder, we can never achieve justice, let alone reproductive freedom. We ask that the legislature's commitment to the immediate and long-term work ahead include the operationalizing of racial equity and enact a process that partners with Black communities and organizations every step of the way.

Sincerely,

Emily McLain
Executive Director
Planned Parenthood Advocates of Oregon