

HB 5001 Testimony

For the record, my name is Teresa Alonso Leon and I am the Representative for House District 22, which incorporates Woodburn, Gervais, and North Salem. As a champion on social justice, equity and access, I want to voice my strong support for HB 5001.

I want to begin by saying that I am proud to belong to one of the most diverse Legislative bodies Oregon has ever had. On the house side, we have four Latino legislators, an African American legislator, and an Native American Legislator. On the Senate side, I believe we have three African American legislators. While we don't yet have a true legislative representation of our growing diverse community, I know we can count on the Oregon Advocacy Commissions to help elevate and identify issues that are important to segments of our population.

Oregon's Advocacy commissions are pivotal in making sure that marginalized communities are being reached. They are engaging the community through voter registration drives, and leadership development and identifying policy issues. They are also providing essential research that is directly impacting and shaping legislation.

Two years ago, I was appointed to the Oregon Commission on Hispanic Affairs (OCHA), which to this day is one of my favorite appointments. I am proud of the work OCHA has done in identifying an issue with in the Latino Community relating to mental health disparities among Latino Youth. This research was presented before the Health Committee in 2017, and the Ways and Means Subcommittee on Human Services in 2018. It raised awareness about the significant unmet mental health services needs of Latinos in Oregon.

That information led to the creation of one of my bills. HB 2941 aims to recruit a more diverse pool of people going into the mental health profession. This will increase that number of mental health professionals, but more importantly it will increase the number of bilingual and culturally competent mental health professionals working with our culturally diverse population. This is just one example of the impact of their work.

For us to truly serve our growing diverse communities, we must understand their needs. We do so by investing in agencies such as OACO.

I urge you to support HB 5001, so that the Oregon Advocacy Commissioners can continue to provide research, advocacy, leadership and partnerships.