

CANN

COFA Alliance National Network

HB 2706-COFA Dental Bill

HB 2706 will establish a COFA Dental Program that will provide dental care to low-income citizens of Pacific Island countries with Compacts of Free Association who reside in Oregon and lack access to affordable dental coverage.

It should be pointed out that immigrants who hold a Green Card have access to the social safety net including, Medicaid, welfare and food stamps (TANF). House bill 4071, while providing assistance to about 1,000 low income Oregon COFA residents with out-of-pocket expenses for medical coverage, did not include oral care as does Medicaid for low income Americans and Green Card holders. As of January, 2019 and since 1,676 people were enrolled in the program. The program is providing quality health care for the first time in Oregon. The bill passed unanimously.

Yet as we all know oral care is absolutely vital to the health of all people. Neglect of preventative oral care can lead to cavities and serious infections which in turn can lead to mouth infections, sinus and lung infections and even heart disease, leading to poor health and emergency room visits. COFA residents have not even had access to basic preventative dental care.

The COFA Alliance National Network urges passage of HB-2706 in order to secure modest oral care which is moving the COFA residents further down the path of the long sought equity that has been missing since 1996. The passage of this bill will certainly build stronger, healthier COFA families in Oregon communities. We urge your support of providing this important adjunct to the COFA Premium Assistance program previously passed by this body.

Background of the COFA Alliance National Network (CANN):

CANN's singular purpose is to put a spotlight on the social and economic inequities experienced by the COFA residents of these nations that live in the United States. While the people of these three nations are allowed to remain in the US permanently by terms of the Compact agreements, their classification as non-immigrants since the US Congress passed the Personal Responsibilities and the Work Reconciliation Act in 1996 has excluded them from accessing many essential low-income services, benefits and public assistance. This exclusion was likely an oversight given that COFA residents pay all local, state and federal taxes, join the US military and offer their home islands for US defensive and military purposes.

Recognizing the uniqueness of an international agreement known as the Compact of Free Association that the United States has with three Pacific Island Nations - Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI), Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) and the Republic of Palau (ROP), a group of concerned COFA residents and allies formed the COFA Alliance National Network of Oregon (CANN) in 2014. While CANN started in Oregon, it has extended its support to sister CANN organizations in other states for the purpose of introducing and enacting equity legislation. To date, two other CANN affiliates are operating in Washington and Texas. Since the Oregon CANN is the parent organization for these entities, it provides lobbying support to CANN affiliates and to other organizations that have similar objectives in sponsoring and introducing COFA equity bills.

This year, 2019, CANN is supporting COFA equity bills in Oregon, Washington, Arkansas, and Texas. We encourage your support in helping to accomplish the passage of a COFA Dental Program. This program is established in the Oregon Health Authority and shall be administered in collaboration with the Department of Consumer and Business Services. The purpose of HB 2706 is to provide oral health care to low-income citizens of the island nations in the Compact of Free Association who are residing in Oregon. It is absolutely vital to the health of all people and COFA residents have not had access to basic preventative dental care.

The COFA Alliance National Network urges passage of the COFA Dental bill in order to secure the long sought equity that has been missing since 1996. The passage of this bill will certainly build stronger, healthier families in our community