

## House Bill 2706 COFA Dental Bill

Good Afternoon Chair Salinas, Vice Chairs Hayden and Nosse. My name is Alishia Perman, and I come from the state of Pohnpei of the Federated States of Micronesia, one of the three COFA countries. If any of you have eaten tuna fish recently, it may have come from my island, as tuna is one of our largest exports.

As you probably know, many people have been migrating from FSM to the United States to seek a better life for themselves and their families. While the major reason starts out to be employment for the adults and better education for the children, as people grow older, healthcare becomes more of a priority than it was to begin with. House Bill 4071 (which provides basic health care to low income families from the COFA nations) went a long way toward providing health care access for COFA people. This was access they had not had since 1996, and the state of health of COFA people in Oregon was significantly improved by your passage of this bill.

What was missing from the bill was dental coverage. Oral health is critical to a person's wellbeing because lack of it can lead to serious infections, chronic issues with pain, tooth and gum disease. These problems can impact a person's ability to chew, speak and can promote sinus and throat infections and even lead to heart disease.

Low-income citizens and green card holders are able to receive Medicaid benefits, which includes basic dental care. COFA people fall through the cracks due to bureaucratic definitions that exclude them from these programs. COFA people are here to be part of society and contribute to it, I think they deserve at least that much parity with other low-income populations.

As a COFA citizen, I also struggle with no dental coverage. A majority of us could really use dental care but are unable to afford the soaring cost of dental insurance. I understand that there is a chance of my health being at risk as not receiving the oral care needed can lead to such health risks such as Type 2 diabetes, heart disease which I've already mentioned earlier and even cancer. In my case, moving from one city to another and leaving my job in search of better opportunities can make something like acquiring dental coverage a bit too overwhelming and difficult.

We are very grateful for the COFA health bill and premium assistance program. If this COFA dental bill passes, it will have a tremendous effect on the COFA community. COFA citizens will be more able to become contributing members to the community knowing that oral health will become one less factor to worry about in contribution to their overall health. Thank you for your time and I truly hope that you will support House Bill 2706.

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