

Kate Brown
Governor



Oregon Commission on Black Affairs
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Testimony in Support of HJR 202
February 20, 2020
Senate Committee on Health Care, 1 pm, HR A

Chair Senator Monnes Anderson, Vice-Chair Senator Linthicum, Senator Beyer, Senator Fagan, and Senator Knopp:

I appreciate the opportunity to offer my testimony in support of House Joint Resolution 202, which would provide Oregon voters the opportunity to add health care to the basic services provided to its residents as part of the State Constitution. It opens a path to effective, medically appropriate and affordable health care in Oregon. At their request, I am also submitting this testimony on behalf of Jamal Fox, Chair of the Oregon Commission on Black Affairs and the Chairs of the Commissions on Asian and Pacific Islander Affairs, Hispanic Affairs and Commission for Women, each of which supports HJR 202.

My name is Mariotta Gary-Smith, and I’m a member of the Oregon Commission on Black Affairs, and a trained public/sexual health educator, with over 20 years of experience. Since 2009, I’ve worked in Portland, my home city, with a specific focus in communities of color.

I identify with and live every day as an African American/Black person in Oregon – which brings statistical cursors of poorer health outcomes as noted in multiple studies (2015 State of Black Oregon; 2016 Communities of Color Coalition). As someone who works in communities that have historical roots of denial and disenfranchisement, it is of great importance that I’m able to provide clear, concise and accurate health information to people that I train, educate and advocate for. Teaching people how to advocate for the health care they deserve is what drives me every day. I’ve been fortunate to have learned from a strong family and community base about the importance of knowing my rights. Health care, and the access to equitable, affordable health services is a primary need. It is not fair to burden people and communities who are deeply impacted by various structural, historical, institutional and social disenfranchisement to “not get sick”, to “not care for their families”, to “not have the expectation that the services they receive are culturally respectful and supports their best outcomes”.

As someone who worked within a local public health authority, I saw firsthand what challenges people encounter when attempting to access health insurance and health care. As an educator,

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Policy Analyst/Researcher

I seek to impact the outcomes of my clients/patients by empowering them to develop plans for consistent & regular check-ups, build their knowledge about particular diseases and other conditions that impact them & their communities; and encouraging them to ask questions about their health care, providers and services - because they have the right to engage in their own health journey. I've seen where positive health outcomes are connected to how someone knows and engages with the health care system, and if they're able to advocate for themselves. If people are unable to gain access to health care as their given right, it perpetuates the idea that many communities are not worthy of consideration and expendable – particularly those that are already experiencing greater harm and disease.

With more Oregonians gaining access to care as a result of the ACA (Affordable Care Act), it strikes me as even more important to ensure that ALL Oregonians can receive the health care they need and deserve as a basic tenet of the Oregon constitution. Allowing voters to choose this option, and by so doing, making health care affordable is a primary rule to support this effort. By establishing this right as part of the state Constitution, this can be a significant step towards building a transformative health care system for many years to come, especially when looking at the current national political climate.

And, this also cements Oregon as a place that is willing to explore ways of making health care a main priority, searching for ways to reduce costs without harming its citizens - urban to rural; citizens of varying identities, expressions and abilities; low and middle-income populations, and communities of color - ALL its citizens are able to access and afford health care. Oregon has the opportunity to step forward to concretize its commitment to all its communities by ensuring access to quality, affordable health care in our state constitution.

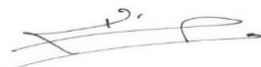
As a member of the Oregon Commission on Black Affairs, as a native & citizen of Oregon - as someone who is dedicated to serving my community for better health, I urge your support for House Joint Resolution 202.

Mariotta Gary-Smith

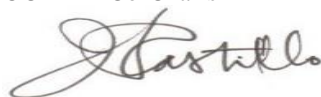
Mariotta Gary-Smith, Member, Commission on Black Affairs



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