



Testimony on SB 557-COFA Dental Bill and SB 706-COFA Medicaid Outreach Bill

March 8, 2021,
Senate Health Care Committee

Chair Patterson, Vice Chair Knopp, and Committee members,

The COFA Alliance National Network or CANN is a non-profit organization that is dedicated to advocating and lobbying for the restoration of all forms of social and economic justice that have been denied to COFA citizens living in Oregon and the US. COFA citizens are permanent legal residents of the US by virtue of a unique treaty with the US known as the Compact of Free Association (COFA). This compact is with three Pacific Island Countries, The Republic of the Marshall Islands, The Federated States of Micronesia, and the Republic of Palau. No other nation has such a treaty with the US. It is noteworthy to mention that COFA citizens swear an oath to the United States when their people join the military, which they do in larger percentages than any US state. CANN is grateful to the Oregon Legislature for their help in restoring some of the most egregious of these inequities having enacted 6 COFA bills. Still there remains more to be done, and SB 557 and SB 706 will greatly add to filling pressing gaps in health care coverage.

The COFA *Dental Equity Bill* will provide Medicaid-level dental care for those who do not qualify for Medicaid but do qualify for the COFA Premium Assistance Program for their medical insurance. It is important to know that federally funded Medicaid is only available to COFA citizens that meet the income limits through age 64. The expectation is that people will transition to Medicare at the age of 65, however many if not most COFA citizens do not qualify for Medicare as they do not have the required quarterly credits (40). This bill fills a gap for COFA seniors, as it allows those that do not qualify for Medicare, but do qualify for COFA Premium Assistance, to still be able to receive basic dental care. Also, those who do not qualify for Medicaid, but do qualify for Oregon Supplemental Income Program-Medical insurance would be covered for dental care.

SB 706, the COFA Medicaid Outreach bill requests 2 multilingual, multicultural FTE's for the Oregon Health Authority (OHA). It also requests a \$300,000 grant to an organization that has experience in reaching and supporting the Medicaid eligible COFA citizens in their household

locations in order to effectively complete the Medicaid application process. These two components are absolutely essential to ensure that all eligible COFA citizens are enrolled in Medicaid.

It also is of critical importance that the Oregon Health Authority employ culturally competent staff with experience who can effectively administer the Medicaid outreach program. This culturally based organization(s) receiving the grant will play an essential role by reaching COFA citizens in their own household environments and ensure the highest level of qualified enrollees for the new federally funded Medicaid program. Without this bill, there will be many eligible persons that will not receive any medical services. CANN estimates as many as 30 to 50 percent of most COFA citizens have never heard of Medicaid. Not knowing what Medicaid is will make it difficult, if not impossible, for many COFA citizens to negotiate the application and enrollment processes. This would be due to language barriers, a complicated system to navigate, access issues and mobility handicaps.

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