

Good day, I am Michael Cebert, a 2L law student at The Northwestern School of Law of Lewis and Clark College. I write in support of SB 619, which directs the Department of Revenue to establish a program to pay reparations to Black Oregonians who can demonstrate heritage in slavery.

I am also a black man, a descendent of trans-Atlantic slaves in Jamaica. I grew up with the many of the badges of slavery that still exist in Alabama. Even generations removed from slavery, I have still been under the yoke of the consequences of slavery and anti-black white supremacy. Reparations were not only contractually promised to black Americans, the badges and legacy of slavery have been cemented generation after generation by Jim Crow, de jure public white supremacy and black exclusion in places such as Oregon. Not only were black people enslaved, they were subsequently excluded, terrorized, impoverished, and criminalized in an intentional manner. This is not just ancient history. Many black Americans, myself included, have suffered the consequences of this legacy.

This is not something black people should or can "get over" or "forget". Reparations are simply meant to situate black Americans to the economic position they would have been had it not been for slavery and discrimination, not to tax white people for white supremacy. This bill represents a rough estimation of that cost. Some may be alarmed that white Oregonians are being asked to pay for the actions of generations past. In truth, white Oregonians, like white individuals all over the nation, have had a system tailored to their benefit. Oregon attempted to exclude black settlers from entering the state. Racial covenants in Oregon have denied people of color the right to own property. White Americans who may be concerned that they are paying for their ancestor's sins must also consider that black Americans were never afforded justice for their oppression, but were just paid with more oppression. Black people did not get 40 acres and a mule, they received 100 years of Jim Crow. Even in Oregon, where there was no legal slavery, the legacy and badges of enslavement were embraced and enacted to the detriment of black Oregonians.

As the United Nations' Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent outlines, "Despite substantial changes since the end of the enforcement of Jim Crow and the fight for civil rights, ideology ensuring the domination of one group over another, continues to negatively impact the civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights of African Americans today". Or, as Abraham Lincoln put it, "Yet, if God wills that it continue until all the wealth piled by the bondsman's 250 years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, as was said 3,000 years ago, so still it must be said 'the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.'" Lincoln asserted that the sin will travel down generations. America has never acknowledged this truth in a meaningful way, nor has it sought to avoid its consequences. Black Americans have been paying with their lives for these consequences; it is time that America makes meaningful recognition of its past.

There are many ways to implement reparations, and there is an argument that there are better ways to implement such a scheme than this bill proposes. Particularly, I would encourage a scheme that was established in Evanston, IL, funding the reparations from the booming legal cannabis industry. This would represent equity, especially considering the legalization of marijuana has left behind people of color who were disproportionately criminalized for cannabis sale and consumption. However, America MUST reckon with its past, and actively combat the inequities that it spent so long to establish. For these reasons, I support SB 619. Thank you.