

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 618

Dear Members of the Senate Judiciary Committee,

Our country has never fully examined, reckoned with, or accounted for the harms and cruelty of slavery, and neither has the State of Oregon. The trauma of the horrific violence committed against slaves has been passed down for generations, robbing the descendants of slaves of their humanity and generational wealth. Jim Crow laws and the policy decisions, militarization of police, and era of mass incarceration since then have institutionalized racism, inequality, and discrimination, ensuring that Black people are subjected to continued injustice.

Not only is reparations for African Americans a moral imperative, there is long standing legal precedent for it. First, according to the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (1969) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1976), to which the U.S. is a party, people have the right to an effective remedy for human right violations committed against them, including racial discrimination. Second, under international human rights law (U.N. General Assembly Resolution 50/147 of 16, December 2005), governments have an obligation to provide effective remedies for violations of human rights; and victims, people who individually or collectively suffered harm, should receive full and effective reparations that are proportional to the gravity of the violation and the cumulative harm suffered. Third, in 1980, the U.S. Congress established a commission to investigate the forced relocation and internment in camps of Japanese Americans and others during World War II, which paved the way for a formal reckoning with these serious human rights abuses, including financial compensation to surviving victims.

According to international human rights standards (U.N. Human Rights Committee, General Comment No. 31, paras 15 et seq; Basic Principles), reparations may take many forms, such as restitution, compensation, rehabilitation, satisfaction, and/or guarantees of non-repetition. The Movement for Black Lives is calling for the following repairs for the Black community: (1) full and free access to lifetime education, (2) a guaranteed minimum livable income, (3) access to and control of food sources, housing, and land, (4) mandated public school curriculums that critically examine the political, economic, and social impacts of slavery, and (5) funding to support, build, preserve, and restore cultural assets and sacred sites. Clearly, there are several different ways that Black Oregonians can be delivered reparations.

African Americans in Oregon have never been compensated for the brutal and inhumane treatment they have endured throughout history and continue to suffer from today. We ask that you please pass this bill so our state government can begin to study how it might provide reparations to Black Oregonians.

Sincerely,

Showing Up for Racial Justice (SURJ)
St. Johns Chapter
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