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Oregon House Committee on Rules

Hilary Mar Lopez Nichols, Health Equity Community Organizer

Friday, March 19, 2021

### **Support for HB 2337**

Dear members of the Oregon House Committee on Rules,

We are long overdue in calling out racism for what it is: a public health crisis. As a biracial Black woman who works in healthcare, I face the devastating impacts of racism on myself, my BIPOC colleagues, and the BIPOC patients I encounter on a daily basis. Racism is pervasive and integrated into every single institution and system in our state, and we know from decades of research that racism and other systems of oppression are the root cause of all the social determinants of health. I am writing to express my support for HB 2337 because this bill takes an important step in acknowledging Oregon's racist foundations and takes several meaningful strides in creating more racially equitable solutions to promote health in our state.

I serve as a community organizer for health equity at a community health center in SE Portland, which means that the patients that I work with experience a high degree of social needs (such as food, housing, income, etc.) that impact their health. As a community organizer, I work with our patients and community leaders to support the institutional policies and laws that will mitigate the impacts of racism, classism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism, xenophobia, and white supremacy that negatively affect health.

These systems of power are the structural drivers that shape the distribution of power, resources, opportunity and justice and result in community-level social determinants of health, which further result in individual social needs and risks. My community and myself value an "upstream" approach to health and believe that true community health cannot be achieved until we address the systems of power that create the inequities we see in the first place. By supporting HB 2337, you could be a national leader in addressing health upstream by demonstrating a strong model for other states to follow.

We are ready for racism to be declared a public health emergency, and we need this to happen so that the appropriate resources are dedicated to reducing health disparities. In addition to declaring a public health emergency, HB 2337 does so much to strengthen Oregon's approach to health equity, such as the expansion of the collection of REAL-D data, meaningful investment in community engagement, increase in language access, and expansion of mobile health units. For the health of our BIPOC communities, my BIPOC colleagues, and myself, I urge you to support HB 2337.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify, and for your efforts to manifest a healthier Oregon.