

March 22, 2021  
Oregon House Committee on Rules

Re: Support of HB 2337

Submitted online

Dear House Rules Committee:

On behalf of Project Access NOW (PANOW), I write to urge your support of HB 2337 declaring racism a public health crisis. PANOW is a non-profit in the tri-county area with a mission to improve our communities' health and well-being by creating access to care, services, and resources for those most in need. We offer a suite of programs promoting access to care and social services, regardless of an individual's insurance status or type. Our impact is vast, last year specifically:

- We moved more than 200 clients from donated care to insurance, creating capacity for others who need donated care and those who do not qualify for health insurance.
- We filled 17,118 low-cost prescriptions, totaling \$2,705,778 in savings for low-income patients.
- We paid \$963,098 in medical premiums, insuring 737 individuals from 550 households.
- We enrolled 7,556 individuals in health coverage and provided 4,919 instances of health care system navigation assistance (representing about 5,764 people when accounting for their dependents and families).
- We responded to 19,543 requests from the health systems for navigation assistance, aiding 10,902 clients in getting access to basic services such as emergency housing, transportation, and food.

Across all programs, our clients are largely low-income, from immigrant populations, non English-speaking, and/or undocumented. Today 90% of our clients identify as Black, Indigenous, or people of color (BIPOC). 80% of our staff are bilingual and/or bicultural and roughly 60% are first or second generation immigrants, reflecting the communities we serve. Our state was built on racist systems, which has had the downstream impact of creating and widening the gap in health outcomes between populations over time. HB 2337 acknowledges this history and is a starting point in rectifying present day institutional practices which sustain such racial inequities. At a fundamental level, this Bill recognizes the important role race places on health outcomes.

Without a focused intention toward the communities served by organizations like PANOW, we will continue to see crises – like the COVID-19 pandemic – impact our BIPOC communities most. Since the pandemic hit in spring 2020, PANOW has continued to be at the frontlines of an evolving response. Over the past year, we helped distribute \$1.1 million in federal COVID-19 relief funds directly to the community during the pandemic and have been a critical access point for information about the virus, especially for underserved communities.

We urge support of HB 2337 and the articulated strategies it includes. As our friends at the American Public Health Association have noted, a declaration is only the starting place, but a critical one in the fight towards racial justice. This statement – and the included preliminary strategies – is one that we need Oregon state leadership to align behind together to acknowledge our past and move forward in making our state a more equitable place to live and grow.

Regards,

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Executive Director