

Chair Smith Warner and Members of the Committee,

My name is Laura Alexander. I am a Licensed Clinical Social Worker at a youth-serving non-profit in Portland, OR. I hold a masters of social work but also of public health. I am writing to request your support for HB2337.

HB 2337 declares racism a public health crisis in Oregon. Racism causes harm, trauma, illness, and death to Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) Oregonians. HB 2337 acknowledges that Oregon's very founding as a state was rooted in racist ideals, and the damaging impact of these and other racist policies continue to exist within our present-day policies and systems. Further, this bill signals the need for accelerated, intentional actions to heal these injustices and articulates six initial strategies and investments to address health inequities.

Over the years, public health and sociological research have produced a vast body of evidence clearly demonstrating that BIPOC racial identity is independently associated with poorer health outcomes than for white people. The Covid-19 global pandemic has shown us here in Oregon that even effective public health measures to protect our citizens had a disparate impact on our BIPOC residents, who have born much of the burden of this pandemic. At my alma mater, the University of Michigan School of Public Health, the fact that racism is a public health crisis has been a widely-accepted fact for years already - it is time for the state of Oregon to catch up and acknowledge this truth! Oregon's long history of racial inequity, marginalization, exclusion, and out-and-out violence toward BIPOC communities must be faced and reckoned with. It is through steps such as these - identifying underlying causes of health disparities - that we will be able to move forward in confronting and changing the present circumstances for the better. Please support HB2337 - it is the ethical, moral choice in this matter. Thank you very sincerely for considering my testimony.