



3/23/2021

**Attn:** House Committee on Rules, Chair Smith Warner, Vice Chairs Drazen and Holvey, and members of the committee

**From:** Oregon Health Equity Alliance (OHEA)

**Re:** Testimony in support of HB 2337

Greetings Chair Smith Warner, Vice Chairs Drazen and Holvey, and members of the committee. We are writing to you on behalf of the Oregon Health Equity Alliance (OHEA) in support of HB 2337, Racism as a public health crisis.

Oregon Health Equity Alliance (OHEA) is a people-of-color led collaborative, organized to center and uplift the wisdom of our communities of color through racial justice-informed health equity policies and practices. This is a part of the movement to dismantle white supremacy and shift the imbalance of power in our state. We are also one of six Regional Health Equity Coalitions (RHECs) across the state, representing Washington, Clackamas, and Multnomah counties.

HB 2337 declares racism as a public health crisis in Oregon. Racism causes harm, trauma, illness, and death to Oregon Tribes as well as 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.

We have heard that there are some questions about possible efforts within this bill that are addressed elsewhere, and we would like to take this opportunity to share an example of why we believe this bill, in its entirety, needs to be passed. OHEA along with many other community-based organizations and partners have been working on efforts around REAL-D compliant data collection for many years. These efforts date back to the passage of HB 2134 and continue today on the REAL-D Governance Committee. It is clear to us that a single policy approach to a very large, complex problem isn't effective as a solution. This is an example of why we need a constellation of policies that support similar and aligned efforts so that meaningful change happens. If we rely on one bill to try to mitigate decades of inequitable practices, we are doing a disservice to our communities who continue to suffer every single day. As we know with REAL-D, we are still nowhere near our goals of having meaningful disaggregated data by race, ethnicity, language, and disability. This means communities continue to be further invisibilized and often asked to 'prove' the inequities they experience every day or are told that 'the data doesn't show that inequities exist. It is then put back on

community members to do the work to advocate for better strategies within systems that they have little to no control over. This severely limits the impacts of the policies passed, and often community members most impacted never really feel the impacts of policies meant to protect/support/center them.

Additionally, this content of this bill has been thoughtfully designed to ensure accountability and touchpoints within OHA, is an important piece for us, as we often see the missed opportunities to ensure the work is happening in the way in which the policy was designed, and that there is some form of accountability offered. Often we see policies passed that do not get implemented in ways that maintain the fidelity of the bill from a community standpoint, and without accountability measures in place, there is little opportunity for community advocates and individuals to support the implementation, through efforts that remind agencies that these policies are not just about the words on paper, but they are about people's lives. This bill will not fix racism in Oregon, however, we believe it takes thoughtful and important steps to begin to build programs and practices that will allow for systemic change to occur, and for our state to name, acknowledge and work towards solutions to mitigate for systemic racism and structural inequities caused by racism and colonialism.

OHEA has participated in this task force throughout the creation and development of this bill and would like to note the importance of the multipronged efforts of this bill. Below are the six strategies developed by the task force to address and mitigate the impacts of systemic racism in Oregon:

1. Expand and support the collection of REAL-D data
2. Meaningfully invest in community engagement to identify future strategies
3. Health Equity Policy Analyst to disrupt policy from maintaining racist outcomes
4. Increase health equity through language access
5. Increase community voice in the legislative process
6. Remove barriers to increase access and quality of care in BIPOC communities

Thank you for the consideration of this testimony along with the others that you have heard/read today. We urge you to support HB 2337 and hope you feel confident knowing that you are supporting an effort that is community member-led and driven.

In health,

Zeena Junkeer, ND  
Director, Oregon Health Equity Alliance (OHEA)