

April 17th, 2021

Dear Joint Committee on Ways and Means Chair & Subcommittee members, (Capital Construction & ARPA):

Good Afternoon: My name is Joe McFerrin II, I am President/CEO of POIC, (Portland Opportunities Industrialization Center), I urge you to support SB 5555, that will declare an emergency on Jul 1, 2021 and appropriate general fund and other federal resources to help recover from this national pandemic. We are in critical times for our most vulnerable residents during the COVID-19 crisis. I believe these resources will build up those communities that have been hardest hit through hope and the ability to work. As you know, POIC has helped to remove barriers to education for over 20 years by helping young people obtain their GED and supporting them with valuable training and skills to go into the workforce.

I am bringing my one time only capital request of 1.2 million dollars to build resiliency and cook up opportunity with the new “Kitchen” and Culinary Academy project. This project will give my students hands on experience in the food service industry in Rockwood, (Gresham area). We plan to open September 6, 2021. We need the Oregon legislature to be our last money in to help complete the “Kitchen” project, to give our youth the chance they deserve to have a bright future.

The Kitchen serves three main functions:

1. Bring production of daily school lunches in house for our five school campuses. Access to healthy food is our students' number one request! The Kitchen allows POIC+RAHS to control food quality and nutrient density. It also offers the practical application of cooking daily school meals as a hands-on learning experience for culinary academy participants and other students.
2. Launch a culinary academy and food-based career training program. Like our other successful workforce development programs, the curriculum is culturally specific and uniquely accessible. Beyond the restaurant world, this academy trains students in a variety of food-based businesses from food science to urban agriculture to sustainable food production and more. The Academy provides pathways to living wage careers in high growth industries.
3. Teach nutrition, healthy living, cost-effective food preparation and more to the broader community of families and individuals POIC+RAHS serves. These health affirming topics can be applied immediately to improve one’s quality of life and future opportunities. This is critical as Black and African American communities continue to disproportionately face food insecurity, food deserts, and rising health disparities.

Sincerely,

Joe McFerrin II, President/CEO
POIC

