

Good evening members of the ways and means committee,

I'm Joe Curran, a community organizer with East County Rising. Thank you for the opportunity to speak tonight.

As a starting point, I want to ask if we can agree that the role of our state is to serve the communities that live in Oregon, and that we should use our resources to support the stable, dignified, and thriving lives of residents?

If that is a shared overall aim or goal, and if the budget is a manifestation of how we prioritize using a primary pool of resources (in this case 2 pools, including ARPA funding) which you have the power to distribute, then people in the community need to know how each line item in the budget improves the lives of their families, friends, and neighbors.

We want to know, in what ways does the budget provide the resources that our families sleeping in their cars or motels or streets need to have safe, stable, and dignified housing?

How does it provide for the safety of our black and brown community members? Of our neighbors struggling with mental health and addiction?

How does it ensure no one in our communities are doing worse now, compared to before the pandemic?

How do we make sure workers have the wages, benefits and rights they need to provide for their families? And that unemployed residents have good job opportunities that pay family wages.

I am asking the committee and staff to provide a report for the community to tell us what representation there has been and is in the development and approval of the budget -- both for the American Rescue Plan funds and the state's regular operating budget. What representation has there been from various communities such as different cultural communities, groups that share common struggles because of their citizenship status, or because they rent housing rather than own, or because they are houseless?

In East County, a diverse group of community organizers and members built on four months of learnings about the needs in the communities we aim to serve, and from these learnings we formed, edited, and submitted an ARPA proposal in collaboration with Senator Gorsek.

But nowhere on the application would you know that. How can you confidently make decisions about which proposals to consider and incorporate into the budget if you don't even know what people and organizations formed the very proposals you are looking at?

I am asking that the committee asks each legislator who submitted a proposal to provide the additional information of what people and groups were involved in the formation of each proposal, and that information is publicly available.

And as we see these proposals, if communities that are disproportionately affected by our emergencies--from housing to covid to climate change to community safety to racial oppression to worker exploitation -- do not have majority representation in the State's decisions making bodies and are not heard in the decision making process; and we lack structures to hold decision makers accountable to diverse communities; how are we going to work together to address these inequities?

We need to know. Because if you do not have a good answer, what is the justification for keeping the things they are? If you cannot answer these questions, I find it difficult to claim that our State is transparent and accountable to "community"?

Communities do not need an opportunity for input after a budget has been formed. They need to be involved in the formation of the outreach and decision making plan itself, and we must always be asking who we are missing.

You can email me your response, and I hope the committee will be responsive to the concerns of the community.

Thank you.