

800 NE Oregon St., Ste. 730
Portland, OR 97214
Voice: (971) 673-0984
FAX: (971) 673-0994
TTY: (971) 673-0372

Date: January 31, 2022

TO: The Honorable Teresa Alonso Leon, Chair
House Committee on Education

FROM: Patrick Allen, Agency Director
Oregon Health Authority

SUBJECT: HB 4099 Racial Equity and Justice Youth Collaborative

Chair Alonso Leon and members of the committee;

The Oregon Health Authority (OHA) is pleased to support HB 4099 which creates a Racial Equity and Justice Youth Collaborative in Oregon. The Collaborative would serve as a necessary platform for youth from diverse backgrounds to provide direction to state leaders and to engage in state level shared decision making in issues that matter the most to young people.

The stated goal of the Collaborative is to support diverse youth leaders in the policy making process at the state level, and to ensure that youth – particularly youth who have been historically, and currently underrepresented or underserved – are meaningfully involved in the creation and implementation of the policies and practices that impact their lives. Given COVID-19's impact on schools, school communities, and youth – now more than ever, youth voice is needed to design effective policy and programs that ensure that young people can heal, learn, grow, and thrive as we move into the next phase of pandemic recovery in Oregon.

OHA is committed to intentionally breaking down systemic and structural barriers to ensure equitable educational and health outcomes in Oregon. HB 4099 supports this goal by elevating community voice and decision making in racial equity and justice issues that affect the lives of Oregon's youth and students. The formation of a statewide youth council complements the work of the Governor's Racial Justice Council and builds strategic alignment towards advancing key priorities. The Collaborative will include youth representing tribal youth councils, youth representing culturally and ethnically specific communities, youth representing alternative education pathways, as well as youth already serving on state workgroups. OHA is ready and committed to strengthen our formal partnership through this Collaborative with youth community representatives who have experienced disproportionate education and health inequities due to historical and contemporary policies and practices.

By institutionally embedding youth voices from historically underserved communities in a sustainable long-term decision-making structure, OHA works towards our north star goal of eliminating health inequities by 2030. The purpose of the Collaborative is to uplift youth voices who have been historically underserved and to meaningfully involve them in examining current state initiatives and practices related to youth and student leadership and engagement; making recommendations on the content and administration of surveys; identifying best practices on reporting of racist incidents and hate crimes; and providing policy recommendations for accessible and culturally affirming programs and services. This new youth advisory and decision-making structure will support youth self-determination, resiliency, as well as the complementary OHA goal to support every student to become an active participant in the health of their community and their future.

Based on the experiences of students of color, HB 4099 was co-designed and informed by over three hundred youth, educators and partners, and facilitated through a partnership between the organizations include REAP Inc., the Oregon Association of Student Councils, the Oregon Association of Secondary School Administrators, and the Coalition of Oregon School Administrators. The concept was developed in collaboration and consultation with three state agencies including the Oregon Department of

Education, Oregon Health Authority, and the Youth Development Division. The bill's development shows the positive social change outcomes achieved by a process that includes authentic youth-adult partnership strategies. All three agencies see the Collaborative as an opportunity to strengthen alignment and coordination, as all are deeply concerned about education equity, youth racial justice and overall youth health and wellness.

In summary, HB 4099 will address a critical need for youth direction and guidance on many state policy decisions that will impact the lives of young people now and in the future. OHA is in full support of HB 4099 and the formation of a new Racial Equity and Justice Youth Collaborative. The Collaborative will play an important role in supporting our agency goal of eliminating health inequities in Oregon by 2030.

Sincerely,

Pat Allen
Agency Director
Oregon Health Authority