



February 3, 2022

Re: Support for SB 1566 - Opportunity to Serve Act

Chair Wagner, Vice-Chair Knopp, and members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of SB 1566, the Opportunity to Serve Act. My name is Jenny Lee, and I am the Deputy Director at the Coalition of Communities of Color, an alliance of culturally specific community-based organizations dedicated to collective action for racial justice.

We believe that every Oregonian with community support should have the chance to lead and participate in our political and policymaking processes, including elected office. Equitable compensation for legislators is essential to making this leadership possible. The opportunity to serve should be open to all, regardless of their wealth, financial support from family members, or access to flexible sources of income.

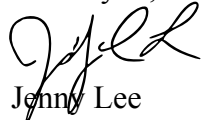
Serving as a legislator is a uniquely challenging and time-consuming job. All of us who have engaged in the legislative process know that Oregon's legislature is far from part time. Throughout the year, legislators spend countless hours responding to their constituents, supporting their communities, and developing policy. In particular, there are no shortcuts to genuine community engagement between a legislator and their constituents. And this is even more true for engaging and supporting constituents who have faced additional barriers like language access, inflexible work schedules, transportation needs, and caregiving responsibilities. Serving Black, Indigenous and other people of color (BIPOC) and immigrants and refugees who have been pushed to the margins of our political system is an essential part of a legislator's job, but genuine community outreach and constituent services take time.

CCC's member organizations have consistently identified legislator pay as a barrier to BIPOC community leaders running for office. Having enough savings or another source of income, or a flexible job that can accommodate serving in the legislature, is not the norm, and these kinds of financial circumstances are even less common for BIPOC Oregonians, as well as immigrants and refugees. We know that structural racism has resulted in lower incomes and less wealth for BIPOC community members. In addition to disparities in wealth and income, BIPOC folks often face additional caregiving and financial responsibilities to support multigenerational and extended family members, whether they live in one household or in another part of the world.

We would also like to note that this legislation advances gender equity and will make service more accessible to parents. Child care costs are burdensome even for those making the average income, and the child care stipend in SB 1566 will make a meaningful difference so that parents can support their families and still serve.

We should be breaking down barriers to public service for BIPOC leaders, and any other Oregonians facing income-based barriers to service, such as individuals with disabilities or those living in rural areas. This is the only path to create a truly inclusive and diverse legislature that contains a range of perspectives, perspectives that enable us to pass laws and budgets that best serve the people of our state. On behalf of the Coalition of Communities of Color, I ask that you support SB 1566 so that every Oregonian with community support has the opportunity to serve.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jenny Lee', written in a cursive style.

Jenny Lee
Deputy Director
Coalition of Communities of Color