

Senate Committee on Health Care
Testimony in Support of SB 1554
February 2, 2002

Chair Patterson, Vice-Chair Kennemer, Senators Beyer,
Linthicum, Manning,

My name is May Saechao, and I am here as a Commissioner of the Oregon Commission for Women and community advocate of the Southeast Asian community. Today, I come to you in support of SB 1554 and developing a method to identify and measure the strengths and challenges of our public health systems. As someone who has worked the front lines of the pandemic from the beginning, I can't express enough on the importance of having such a study.

Oregon Commission for Women

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1. OCFW works toward economic, social, political, and legal equity for the women of Oregon with particular focus on marginalized and underrepresented women of color. We do this through advocacy, public policy research, leadership development, and partnerships.
2. In our statutory role of bringing equity focus and community voice into Oregon policy making, OCFW strongly supports SB 1554.

During the pandemic, I have spent the majority of my time assisting disadvantaged communities in vaccination clinics, mass community testing, rental assistance, addressing food hunger, and other services to help mitigate pandemic hardships. Through these events, I have witnessed how marginalized and underrepresented groups suffered through



these well intended, but ineffective policies, which often times were not reflective of their needs. Many community members reported feeling isolated and abandoned to care for their own people with minimal resources, while some had no representation. Many, dishearteningly, also have stated that it felt like the “pandemic of the poor” and wonder about what future disasters will look like for their people. Accessibility and opportunity for resources were restricted from those who were illiterate or monolingual, those employed with challenging schedules had to choose between income or their health due to the 9 to 5 vaccine clinics. Technology was also difficult for those who did not have resources to electronically schedule vaccine appointments. The list is too extensive to specifically state.

Women, and women with disadvantaged backgrounds in particular, have shouldered an extraordinary burden over the past three years. Due to the absence of an organized, systemic response to the pandemic, women became the social safety net – taking on the load of supervising children’s schooling, and trying to keep themselves and their families safe and healthy, while either being forced to continue working in unsafe conditions – or feeling forced to leave their careers. Future public health responses must center people in an inclusive and holistic way. SB 1554 could help define that structure.

I am speaking today with the understanding that no one individual or systems of government are flawless, but we should always strive to do better and if given the opportunity, we should take advantage of the resources that could potentially lead to success and great outcomes. It is true we are living in unprecedented times where we are all doing our best, but it is also true that we are indebted to the health of our public and the communities in which we serve, to ensure that the mistakes of our history do not reoccur. On behalf of OCFW and marginalized communities in our state, I urge you to support SB 1554.

Sincerely,



Commissioner – The Oregon Commission for Women

