

Submitter: David Anitok  
On Behalf Of:  
Committee: Senate Committee On Health Care  
Measure: SB1538

02/07/2022

Chair Patterson  
V.Chair Kennemer,  
Members of the Senate Health Committee,

lakwe, Lenwo, Rannanim, Ali'i, Mocketin, Kasleleiah and Greetings from the COFA people of Oregon.

My name is David Anitok, co-founder and organizer for CANN which is the COFA Alliance National Network.

It's an honor and a privilege to give a testimony today in support of SB 1538 and to ask for your continued commitment for COFA justice. SB 1538 comes to you as an urgent bill today to address equitable dental care for Oregonians. Oregon very much understands that we are here striving to raise our families due to historical consequences that happened in our Pacific Islands. As a result, many of us felt we had little choice but to move to the US to provide a better life for our families. Thanks to the state of Oregon, especially the policy makers and advocates like Loyd Henion, who have invested their time to carry forward the responsibilities of the United States of America to advance justice for COFA communities.

In 2015, the Oregon Legislature became a pioneer in advancing justice for COFA communities in Oregon. This was the COFA Premium Assistance Program which got the attention of the US Congress. The COFA Premium Assistance Program was a lightning rod across the country which influenced the US Congress to finally take action by restoring Medicaid to COFA residents under the COVID-19 Relief Act of 2020. We are now urging you in this session to see SB 1538 through for a segment of our elders who are turning 65, or have already turned 65, and do not have affordable access to dental care due to systemic as well as systematic barriers. Let's look at the ONE system- getting the COFA people added to the ONE system has been a systematic barrier. Some of our elders get referred to the Aging and Disability program and may get through when they have good navigators who know how to work the system. These navigators are bilingual and have given extra time and energy to troubleshoot this process. This is where we think our elders will drop through the cracks. We believe that creating this dental care program will alleviate these systematic and cultural barriers to address the inequities so that COFA elders can have basic dental care. In short, this bill will allow every low income COFA resident in Oregon to have basic dental care and thereby saving lives. Let's continue

to work together on this one. We'll be here throughout this session and months to come to collaborate with you, truthfully.

At any rate, Chair Patterson, Vice Chair Kennemer, Sen. Beyer and Sen. Manning Jr., thank you for being Co-Chief Sponsors of this legislation. I say Kommol tata which is Marshallese for thank you so much. Kommol can be translated as "yours truly" or "you're most honest". We say thank you for your honesty, trust and action by signing on as sponsors of SB 1538.

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