

To: Senate Committee on Labor and Business

From: Peggy Samolinski | Director, Youth and Family Services Division

Date: February 8, 2022

RE: Testimony in Support of SB 1579

Honorable Chair Taylor and Members of the Senate Committee on Labor and Business,

Multnomah County Department of County Human Services is writing in strong support of SB 1579, which establishes an Equity Investment Fund to provide grants to culturally-responsive community based organizations to support economic stability, entrepreneurship, workforce development, and paths to home and land ownership for individuals, families, businesses and communities demonstrating economic risk factors.

SB 1579 promotes pathways to economic opportunity for Oregonians experiencing the greatest risk of economic instability, with a focus on Black, Indigenous and other People of Color, immigrants and refugees, people living in poverty and in rural locations.

The Fund addresses racial economic inequities that are deep and were longstanding prior to the pandemic. These wealth disparities are the result of decades of discriminatory policies in employment, banking, housing and access to capital - along with policing and incarceration. SB 1579 is a much needed policy solution.

This bill is important to increasing stability, wellness and prosperity for our most vulnerable communities in the coming years. This investment is all the more important for us to achieve an equitable recovery as we emerge from the pandemic. We know:

- COVID-19 has exacerbated economic and racial disparities that existed long before the pandemic.
- Unemployment in Oregon during the pandemic has disproportionately impacted workers from BIPOC communities.
- The leisure and hospitality industries - which employ more women, more BIPOC workers (particularly workers of Latinx origin) and more young workers - have been particularly hard hit.
- According to the Oregon Department of Employment, some of the hardest hit workers by the pandemic recession are among the same demographic groups - particularly Black,

Native American and younger workers - who took the longest to experience the labor market benefits of the last expansion.

Addressing the racial wealth gap and economic stability will take time and a proactive effort such as that included in SB 1579 is urgently needed.

We also are in strong support of these funds and services being distributed through culturally responsive community-based organizations, as the bill proposes. Culturally responsive and specific organizations have trusting relationships with community members and cultural knowledge and experience to ensure the resources are truly responsive to the needs of the recipients and support their self-determination.

Every Oregonian should have the opportunity to build an economically secure and prosperous future for themselves and their family. We at Multnomah County support SB 1579 and ask that you take this opportunity to invest to address racial inequities and point us toward a more stable and equitable future for everyone.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Peggy Samolinski".

Peggy Samolinski
Director
Youth and Family Services Division