

February 8, 2022

Senate Committee on Labor and Business
Senator Kathleen Taylor, Chair
Oregon State Legislature
900 Court Street NE
Salem, OR 97301

Chair Taylor and Members of the House Committee,

I am writing to express the City of Gresham’s support for SB 1579, the Economic Equity Investment Program.

This legislation directs Business Oregon to implement the Economic Equity Investment Program to award grants to qualified organizations that provide culturally responsive services to disadvantaged individuals, families, businesses, and communities. According to Business Oregon's Strategic Plan, most minority groups in Oregon are growing in their population, yet significant disparities exist. Household income and wages are lowest for Oregon's African American, Native American, and Hispanic communities. These groups are also disadvantaged in their access to capital and are underrepresented in employment within the professional and technical services sectors. SB 1579 provides resources to address these disparities by investing in wealth building strategies including workforce development, microenterprise, and home ownership.

The Gresham City Council supports public policy and budget allocations that advance equitable outcomes for Oregonians. The City recognizes and acknowledges the impacts of policy and budget decisions that lead to inequitable outcomes and is actively engaged in evaluating and challenging its own practices and supports state legislation and budget investments that eliminate racial disparities. Gresham currently funds some programs to address these significant disparities through our Community Development Block Grant allocation, but existing need is much greater than available resources. The Economic Equity Investment Program is an important step towards closing the wealth gap faced by many residents due to historic inequities. This is particularly true during the continued economic impacts and loss of income from the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Gresham has been one of the communities most impacted by the pandemic, with some of the highest rates of coronavirus infections in the state. This legislation is critically needed to overcome the barriers that residents in Gresham, and throughout the state, continue to face.

We urge your support for SB 1579.

Sincerely,

Brian Monberg
Government Affairs Manager
City of Gresham