



Support for SB 1538 COFA Dental Equity Bill

February 8, 2022

Alii, Aloha, Hafa Adai, Iakwe, Kasalelei, Malo 'e lelei, Ran Anim, Kasalelei, Talofa and Tirowand Chair Patterson, Vice Chair Kennemer and Members of the Senate Health Committee,

On behalf of the Oregon Pacific Islander Coalition (OPIC), I write to you in support of **Senate Bill 1538**, known as the COFA Dental Equity Bill. OPIC is a collective of Pacific Islander (Melanesian, Micronesian, and Polynesian) led and serving organizations. We organize to create thriving Pacific Islander communities rooted in our many indigenous values, languages, cultures, and histories. OPIC originally formed in April 2020 as a community-led COVID-19 Response Task Force because **our leaders knew firsthand that the existing burdens of chronic illness and lack of access to the social determinants of health** would produce devastating impacts for our communities. Healthy People 2020 and the CDC have noted that **racial/ethnic disparities in oral health exist because of limited access to social determinants of health**, such as education and income.¹

Oregon has the highest concentration of COFA communities within the contiguous United States, and is part of one of the fastest growing communities within Oregon. While COFA communities are able to travel to the United States without restriction, they are not able to become U.S. citizens. This has resulted in **restricted access to core resources like Medicaid and erasure in key data sets that drive decisions to provide equitable access to the social determinants of health**. For example, Oregon's Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance Survey (BRFSS) is the largest, continuously conducted telephone health survey in the world and is a collaborative project between the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and US states and territories. Oregon's state and local health departments rely heavily on the BRFSS for population health data, but Pacific Islanders are severely underrepresented in the data. When data is collected, researchers often fail to disaggregate Pacific Islander data from the Asian Pacific Islander category, and rarely report **more granular level data that highlights the strengths and challenges unique to COFA communities**.

One of these challenges includes the health consequences of **the lack of access to dental care for COFA community members who remain ineligible for Medicaid and the dental benefits necessary for living**

¹ https://www.cdc.gov/oralhealth/oral_health_disparities/index.htm

healthy, thriving lives. This lack of access to oral health care can result in a disruption of everyday abilities such as speaking, eating, or even showing emotions and more severe forms of oral diseases such as oral cancer.² As Oregon's COFA community grows and the need for oral health care to treat more racially/ethnically diverse patients with complex medical and dental needs expands, it is clear that the routine dental care that **Senate Bill 1538** would provide is crucial to our communities and our health systems. We urge the Senate Health Committee to **support Senate Bill 1538.**

Sincerely,



Alyshia Alohalani Macaysa-Feracota on behalf of the Oregon Pacific Islander Coalition

Pronouns: she/her/hers

Title: Executive Director

Oregon Pacific Islander Coalition

Ka `Aha Lāhui o `Olekona Hawaiian Civic Club of Oregon and SW Washington (KALO HCC)

Le'ō 'o e OFA

Living Islands

Micronesia Islander Community (MIC)

Oregon Marshallese Community Association (OMCA)

Rengelkel Belau

Samoan Pacific Development Corporation (SPDC)

Tongan American Resource Committee (TARC)

United Territories of Pacific Islander Alliance Portland (UTOPIA PDX)

West Papua Students

² <https://www.healthypeople.gov/2020/topics-objectives/topic/oral-health>