



Testimony in Support of North Portland Aquatic Center Project
Joint Ways and Means Subcommittee on Capital Construction

State Representative Travis Nelson
February 11, 2022

Co-Chair Girod, Co-Chair Holvey, and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of capital construction funding for the North Portland Aquatic Center Project. I am asking for \$33.3 million in state funding to replace Columbia Pool with a new aquatic center for North Portland.

Columbia Pool served the entire North Portland peninsula, a community that is among the most diverse and underserved in Portland. A wide range of people with diverse needs used this facility: Children, elders, athletes, swim teams, and people of all abilities. The pool helped folks be physically healthier by making physical activity accessible for all income levels. Our youth had free and low-cost access to this facility. We know that after school activities are critical for youth development and keeping kids out of trouble. Columbia Pool provided a vital service of teaching children how to swim. Black children in the United States drown at a rate three times higher than white children. This community needs access to aquatic services.

I have been involved at the city level in the ongoing fight to save the Columbia Pool from closing. After years of deferred maintenance, the condition of the roof had become a safety concern. The community had demanded that the pool be kept open and that the city make the needed repairs. Unfortunately, Columbia Pool has been closed indefinitely.

Now, the community must look to new solutions for aquatic access in this area. The City of Portland has proposed a new aquatic center to serve this community. The cost of this new facility is \$50 million. The City has set aside \$16.7 million for a newly constructed aquatic center that would be similar to other parts of Portland.

North Portland deserves to have the same access to aquatic services as other parts of Portland. The neighborhood that this new aquatic center would serve has 35% of folks who live at or below the poverty line, 45% are people of color and 48% are renters. Students at Rosa Parks elementary school, in the heart of this neighborhood, come from over 20 different countries, and over 90% of students are eligible for free and reduced lunch.

As a nurse, I know that people who live in poverty, people who have experienced historic and ongoing discrimination often have fewer resources to be active and healthy, and this leads to worse health outcomes.

The state has a role to play in addressing this equity issue. By allocating \$33.3 million for this project, we can assure that the community in North Portland will have aquatic access faster than waiting for the City to raise the funds.