

To: Senate Health Care Committee
Subject: Informational Hearing on 988

Greetings Chair Senator Patterson, Vice Chair Hayden and Committee Members,

Thank you very much for conducting this informational hearing on the effectiveness of the 988 hotline for historically marginalized groups such as the COFA communities. Let me first say I wish I could be here in person or via zoom but I have direct conflicts with the hearing's schedule, so I will give my thoughts on this important issue through this venue.

I was born in the Republic of the Marshall Islands but have spent most of my adult life in the United States and attended both high school and college in the US. In 2019 I was elected to a 4-year term on the Bend-La Pine School Board and was appointed to the State Board of Education in 2022 where I now serve as the 2nd Vice Chair. For the last few years, I served as Executive Director of Central Oregon Health Quality Alliance, a non-profit organization dedicated to improving healthcare across a variety of specialties, issues and demographics. I am also serving as a board member of the COFA Alliance National Network or CANN.

I want to take time to offer my thoughts on this critical issue and my fellow board member, Loyd Henion has agreed to read my comments to the committee. (thank you Loyd).

Given my work with the Bend-La Pine School board, the State Board of Education, my nonprofit, and CANN, I have gained a full range of concerns for the challenges young people face in today's society. I further know that these challenges can be magnified among my people and other historically marginalized communities. I find that many young people from my Marshallese culture, when presented with life altering challenges, have difficulty navigating the American systems and don't know where to turn. Suicide rates for Pacific Islanders from 2013-2017 was the highest of all ethnicity groups at 22.5 deaths/100,000 people, three times as high as the rates of the lowest ethnicity groups in our state, and over twice as high as the 2019 global rate published by the World Health Organization.

We must address these racial disparities by ensuring every Oregonian has equitable access to effective 988 services. It also behooves all of our non-profits who are representing our communities to display the 988 information. It is unacceptable to hear there are instances of members from my community, a community with the highest suicide rate in the state, not receiving services from the 988 hotline because of language barriers.

Thank you for letting me submit my thoughts to the Committee.

Warmly,

Shimiko Montgomery
Oregon State School Board
COFA Alliance National Network