

Written testimony template: SB 564, 2023

Chair Patterson and Vice-Chair Hayden,

For the record, my name is Keenan Bloom-Rafael and I am writing this letter in support of SB 564, a bill that will offer support for Regional Health Equity Coalitions (RHECs) to enter into the second phase of expansion which began in 2021 through SB 70. This expansion is working toward statewide representation to develop RHEC capacity to support health equity efforts across Oregon. Specifically, this will expand this program to fully fund the existing ten RHECs; add five new coalitions aimed at achieving statewide coverage; and increase staffing to sufficiently support this important program.

Regional Health Equity Coalitions (RHECs) are autonomous, community-driven, cross-sector groups. The RHEC model works by building on the inherent strengths of local communities to meaningfully involve them in identifying sustainable, long-term, policy, system and environmental solutions to increase health equity for communities of color, and those living at the intersection of race/ethnicity and other marginalized identities.

The fact that these coalitions are community driven is vitally important because of both the distrust people of color often have the authority (and rightfully so, look at history), and the fact that if you want something to really happen than doing it on a community level is needed to get traction and buy in from the local population.

The RHEC model was designed intentionally to ensure that communities most impacted by health inequities were at the forefront of policy, systems and environment change work that impact their communities. These communities include; Oregon's nine federally recognized Tribes, immigrants, refugees, migrant and seasonal farmworkers, low-income populations, persons with disabilities and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning communities in rural and urban areas, with communities of color as the leading priority.

We support the model of RHECs that includes uplifting and centering the impact of structural, institutional, and interpersonal racism on the health and well-being of communities of color. The model also prioritizes meaningful engagement of communities most impacted to lead efforts; and honors community wisdom by ensuring policy and system change solutions build upon community strengths.

We support this bill because it finally will give RHEC the funding they need to do the job they have been given. That vision and purpose is of utmost importance to the future of

many lives and the entire state. This bill will make such a huge impact on so many people, people who are often marginalized and forgotten. It is a moral and political imperative to pass this bill and fund RHEC. The people who are served by this bill have statistically poorer health and shorter life spans and something has to be done about that. I see many patients who suffer from not only some type of physical trauma but also the traumatic effects of institutionalized racism and discrimination. Passing this bill will begin the process of unraveling what has been wrought.

Sincerely,

Keenan Bloom-Rafael

Owner, Liquid Light Healing, Corvallis, Oregon