

My name is Mariotta Gary-Smith, and I appreciate the chance to submit my written testimony today, February 14, 2023, in full support of HB 5001. I offer my testimony as someone who holds multiple roles: a community member/advocate, an Equity Practitioner & former public health educator, and a former Commissioner of the OCBA (Oregon Commission on Black Affairs).

HB 5001 is an opportunity for Oregon to honor the promise to each resident to be actively represented and heard in government – be it in their local communities or a state bureau. The OACO and its staff consistently work on multiple projects that come from active and robust Commissions to support the residents they represent (OCHA, OCBA, OCAPIA and OCFW). From establishing an equitable & consistent practice about data collection, sharing and use to utilizing mobile health services to support the most impacted folks across multiple demographics; to local community consultation - where the wisdom and knowledge of these communities is honored and used to help engage responsible decision making - all this work is brought to & expected to be handled by the staff of the OACO. And they do it wonderfully, but currently at a deficit of appropriate staffing. To me, this is unacceptable – the OACO deserves full funding to continue its work.

It's disrespectful to purport that state government says it's committed to work in collaboration with its diverse communities but continues to underfund a state office – one that was intentionally created - to represent their interests. It's time to fund the OACO appropriately and honor the staff who continue to provide clear, consistent, and reliable support for the work that the Commissions do across the state.

This is a chance for Oregon to honor the amazing legacy & necessary work of the OACO. I urge your support of HB 5001.

Respectfully,  
Mariotta Gary-Smith  
Former Commissioner, OCBA