

Submitter: Emily Clark Cuellar

On Behalf  
Of:

Committee: Senate Committee On Veterans, Emergency Management, Federal  
and World Affairs

Measure: SB776

Dear Members of the Senate Committee on Veterans, Emergency Management,  
Federal and World Affairs,

Our country has never fully examined, reckoned with, or accounted for the harms and cruelty of slavery, and neither has the State of Oregon. The trauma of the horrific violence committed against people who were enslaved has been passed down for generations, robbing their descendants of their humanity and generational wealth. Jim Crow laws and policy decisions, the militarization of police, the “war on drugs,” and the era of mass incarceration since then have institutionalized racism, inequality, and discrimination, ensuring that Black people are subjected to continued injustice.

We see this injustice every day in our communities where our black neighbors often do not have the same access to education, housing, or generational wealth as our white neighbors. Slavery may seem as though it happened long ago, but our systems and our communities still suffer the consequences of slavery every day. This is particularly true in Oregon where Black citizens were not legally allowed to become residents and where the Ku Klux Klan terrorized many communities throughout the 20th century.

Not only is reparations for African Americans a moral imperative, there is long standing legal precedent for it. First, according to the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (1969) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1976), to which the U.S. is a party, people have the right to an effective remedy for human right violations committed against them, including racial discrimination. Second, under international human rights law (U.N. General Assembly Resolution 50/147 of 16, December 2005), governments have an obligation to provide effective remedies for violations of human rights; and victims, people who individually or collectively suffered harm, should receive full and effective reparations that are proportional to the gravity of the violation and the cumulative harm suffered. Third, in 1980, the U.S. Congress established a commission to investigate the forced relocation and internment in camps of Japanese Americans and others during World War II, which paved the way for a formal reckoning with these serious human rights abuses, including financial compensation to surviving victims.

According to international human rights standards (U.N. Human Rights Committee, General Comment No. 31, paras 15 et seq; Basic Principles), reparations may take many forms, such as restitution, compensation, rehabilitation, satisfaction, and/or guarantees of non-repetition. The Movement for Black Lives is calling for the following repairs for the Black community: (1) full and free access to lifetime education, (2) a guaranteed minimum livable income, (3) access to and control of food sources, housing, and land, (4) mandated public school curriculums that critically examine the political, economic, and social impacts of slavery, and (5) funding to support, build, preserve, and restore cultural assets and sacred sites. Clearly, there are several different ways that Black Oregonians can be delivered reparations.

Black people in Oregon have never been compensated for the brutal and inhumane treatment they have endured throughout history and continue to suffer from today. Please pass SB 776 so our state government can begin the long-overdue process of granting Black Oregonians the reparations they are owed.

Sincerely,

Emily Clark Cuellar