

TRAVIS NELSON
STATE REPRESENTATIVE
HOUSE DISTRICT 44
NORTH/NORTHEAST PORTLAND



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 776

February 28, 2023

Thank you, Chair Manning, Vice-Chair Thatcher,

For the record, I am Travis Nelson – the State Representative for House District 44 and a Registered Nurse. Committee members, I am here today in support of Senate Bill 776. This bill is another step in righting historic wrongs for Black and African American Oregonians.

Through this bill, a task force on reparations would be created with a robust mandate. It would study and develop proposals for possible financial and non-financial reparations for Oregonians of African-American descent. Once that study has been conducted, the task force would then develop multiple appropriate methods for educating the public about its findings. And finally, the task force would recommend appropriate remedies based on their research.

The state of Oregon began as a “Whites Only” state, with physical and monetary punishment leveled against Black people who settled in the territory. Black people who did settle here were stripped of nearly all rights, from testifying in court, to voting and owning land. Black residents were taxed annually at a rate of five dollars in the late nineteenth century (which is the equivalent of about \$1,950 in today’s currency). Anyone who could not pay the exorbitant tax was forced to perform road maintenance – slavery in all but name. Oregon also did not fully ratify the Fourteenth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution (which enshrines the rights of citizens and citizenship) until Bill McCoy introduced a House Resolution in the 1970s. That is over one hundred years from the introduction of the amendment.

When you add all of that together, you get a persisting lack of generational wealth in the Black community. Barred from higher-paying jobs, forced to reside in under-funded and under-served parts of the state, and taxed, fined, and punished simply for the color of their skin – Black Oregonians have suffered for nearly 150 years. We owe it to the Black community to research different forms of reparations. That reparation could take the form of financial aid and incentives that would help address the severe lack of generational wealth in the Black community, or other non-financial avenues. We must acknowledge our state’s fraught racial history and continue to heal the deep, ongoing scar of systemic, institutionalized racism within our state.

I urge you to pass SB 776. Thank you.

Thank you,

State Representative Travis Nelson
House District 44, North/NE Portland