

February 7, 2024

Chair Reynolds, Vice Chair Nguyen, Vice Chair Scharf and Members of the House Committee on Early Childhood and Human Services

Re: Oregon IDA General Fund Investment Request

Chair Reynolds, Vice Chairs and Members of the Committee. For the record, my name is Sasha Bartoo-Smith, I am white, Indonesian and also have Native heritage from the Osage and Oneida Nations and I am here today on behalf of the NAYA Family Center as the Community Engagement Specialist. I write to you today to share my deepest support for Oregon IDA funding, and specifically the request for a \$10M General Fund investment in our statewide IDA program as outlined in House Bill 4131.

As a community member as well as a staff member at a Native-serving organization, I have witnessed the profound impacts that IDA saving has had on Portland's urban Indigenous community. In our community, most families have faced countless financial hardships that are a direct result of systemic racism and generations of historical disenfranchisement. We had a recent Portland Youth and Elders Council meeting with community members to discuss priority issues impacting Portland's urban Native community, and a great number of people mentioned financial wellness and living wages as a major daily concern. One community member in particular highlighted this crisis in our community by pointing to Native Americans currently being the demographic with the lowest average income in Multnomah County. This is not just money we are talking about, it's access to life and basic human rights.

In the fall of last year, I fell on hard times when my cat was diagnosed with a life-threatening medical condition that resulted in him needing emergency surgery. This procedure would cost more money than I had to my name, and it all needed to be paid up front. And so I was face to face with the decision to pay an impossible amount of money, or to lose one of my most dearest loved ones in the world. I was incredibly lucky that I was able to call on my mom to sign up for a monthly payment option that was unavailable to me given my low credit score. I have the privilege of being able to lean on certain family members who do have access to wealth and financial stability when charged with impossible situations like this, but I know that many friends and loved ones in my community do not have the same privilege of access to life-saving funds.

In the aftermath of this storm, I was reminded by a close friend that the IDA savings program was there to help me build financial stability and save for future financial emergencies. While I did not end up enrolling in the program at that time, I was reminded of just how close the reality of financial desperation is for so many Native families. Access to housing, medical care, education, transportation and other basic needs are a human right. Initiatives like Oregon's IDA savings program are essential for the acknowledgement and codification of these basic human rights. This is why in addition to my support for House Bill 4131, I want to ask that we add an

IDA saving category for paying off major medical debts and expenses. This is an issue that causes detrimental barriers and hardships for our community, and should be a priority. Our communities deserve access to healthcare, building generational wealth and financial stability.

This is not just money we are talking about, for many, it's life or death. It's having a roof over your head or living on the streets. This is not just about money, it's about basic human rights. We welcome your support of this funding request and encourage you to vote yes on House Bill 4131 as the IDA savings program will help build financial stability for generations to come. And you can help us make sure it gets fully funded.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Sasha Bartoo-Smith