



February 12, 2024

Chair Jama, Vice Chair Andersen, and members of the committee,

I urge you to take action to address the devastating impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Black Oregonians. While the pandemic has affected all Oregonians, it has disproportionately ravaged Black households, exacerbating existing systemic inequalities. Our community has faced unprecedented levels of unemployment, economic insecurity, and housing instability. Black Oregonians are still – despite many efforts to combat these systemically racist events – more likely to have been evicted, more likely to be homeless, and more likely to struggle to make ends meet. The Urban League of Portland has seen firsthand the heartbreaking consequences of this crisis, with Black families facing impossible choices between paying rent, getting medical care, and buying groceries.

That's why we need the proposed rent assistance allocation in Senate Bill 1530, which allocates \$40 million to eviction prevention and rapid response. This funding is critical to support programs like our Empowerment Program, which provided comprehensive case management and support to over 1,200 Black and other Oregonians last year across 13 cities. Our program saw remarkable accomplishments last year, including participants:

- Gaining and maintaining stable housing
- Increasing their income with more lucrative employment opportunities
- Improving credit scores and access to banking solutions
- Achieving long-term employment
- Preparing for homeownership
- Purchasing much needed transportation to increase mobility.

With \$6.5 million from the culturally specific set-aside of the \$40 million allocated, we can scale up this program to reach even more Black and other households on the brink of homelessness. We can provide the support they need to stay in their homes, stabilize their lives, and rebuild their futures. Programs like the Urban League's Empowerment program should be reaching more and more Black Oregonians to help stabilize affected households, prevent new homelessness, advance economic opportunity, and ultimately, work to address a widening wealth gap that threatens to stifle economic growth for the greater good of Oregon.

We cannot afford to ignore the disproportionate impact of this pandemic on our community in the face of COVID-19 stabilization programs ending. We must continue to act with urgency and intention to address the systemic racism that has led to these disparities. I urge this committee to pass Senate Bill 1530 and ensure that Black Oregonians receive the support they need to recover and thrive.

Respectfully Submitted,

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