



**Advocating for Equity and  
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## Senate Committee on Finance and Revenue

### Testimony in Support of SB 1539

February 14, 2022

Chair Beyer, Vice-Chair Boquist, and Senators Armitage, Findley, and Sollman,

My name is Mariotta Gary-Smith, and I currently serve as the Chair of the Oregon Commission on Black Affairs (OCBA). I am submitting this written testimony in support of SB 1539 which would improve academic achievement of houseless youth.

1. The Commission on Black Affairs works toward economic, social, political, and legal equity for Black Oregonians. We do this through advocacy, public policy research, leadership development, and partnerships.
  
2. In our statutory role of bringing equity focus and community voice into Oregon policy making, the OCBA strongly supports SB 1539.

The COVID-19 pandemic has forever changed how the world functions and operates. Many Oregonians will be impacted by the ripple effects of this unprecedented experience, and there are effects that won't be known for years, in terms of how communities and their members have borne the brunt of this moment.

**Oregon Commission on  
Black Affairs**

**Chair:**  
Mariotta Gary-Smith

**Vice-Chair:**  
Dr. Angela Addae, Esq.

**Commissioners:**  
Dr. Silky J. Booker (H.C.)  
Djimet Dogo  
Benjamin Duncan  
Jessica Price, Esq.

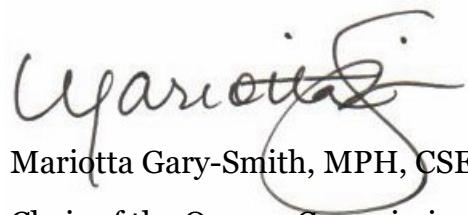
**Legislative Members:**  
Senator James I. Manning

**Oregon Advocacy Commissions  
Office Staff**  
Albert Lee, Executive Director  
Nancy Kramer, Policy & Research  
Dr. Kyl Myers, Public Affairs

This pandemic brought to light what many educators and housing advocates have known: houseless youth have significant experiences of trauma and need, and one of the most impacted areas is education. If we as a collective community talk about supporting young people in their educational experiences, that means ALL young people, regardless of their housing status. The number of young people who don't have safe or adequate housing has grown considerably since the start of the pandemic. If they don't have a support system or team helping them, these young people are more likely to become adults with housing needs/houseless folks. Expanding culturally specific and trauma informed services in communities where the need is the greatest is a step. It's important to start somewhere and to start now. The educational systems and structures have been stretched beyond capacity, and for the educators who connect with these young people every day – they have seen the impact on their classrooms and within their students.

If we want better for our young people and communities, there needs to be a concerted effort to do better by them. The OCBA welcomes your positive consideration of SB 1539.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mariotta Gary-Smith".

Mariotta Gary-Smith, MPH, CSE

Chair of the Oregon Commission on Black Affairs

