

Homelessness Research & Action Collaborative
Portland State University

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March 2, 2021

Oregon House Committee on Housing
Hon. Julie Fahey, Chair
900 Court Street NE, Room 453
Salem, Oregon 97301

Dear Chair Fahey and members of the Committee:

I am the director of Portland State University's Homelessness Research & Action Collaborative. I write to encourage discussion about the issues raised in and discussion about HB 2100. As a scholar of racial equity, public participation, and homelessness, I understand that discussing racial equity, homelessness, and funding at any time be difficult, and that with Covid-19 the context for these conversations are even tougher. At the same time, I know that when we hold off on conversations or actions until there is an imagined better time, people of color continue to be who are most harmed.

Black and Indigenous people of color are over represented in Oregon's homelessness population. Black residents in Oregon are three times more likely than Whites to experience homelessness. And Native Americans are five times more likely than Whites to experience homelessness in Oregon. These racial disparities matter in every facet of addressing homelessness from prevention and service delivery to program design and staffing.

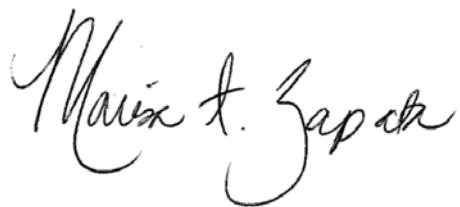
When programs are designed by and for people of color to serve their own communities, they are far more likely to be successful. Research shows that this matters in education, healthcare, and social services. And it matters in homelessness. Organizations intentionally designed to serve and represent people of color can help shape homelessness services around the state to respond specifically to the needs of people of color. Without this intention, systems reinforce and sometimes even increase these racial disparities.

Better evaluation, monitoring, and data systems are also necessary to identify whether and how historically White organizations and institutions are serving communities of color. Such research can also explicate how organizations for and by people of color are best serving their communities. We must be driven by effective policies and programs that achieve racially equitable outcomes, and committed to building upon those practices.

Whether this bill is the best way to achieve the goals of best serving people of color experiencing homelessness, or not, the numbers we do have make plain an unfortunate reality. They tell us that more while many people suffer, people of color suffer at higher rates than white counter parts. More must be done in a way that connects with Black, Indigenous, and other People of Color experiencing homelessness and housing insecurity, and we must document and hold one another accountable for ensuring that work is done and done well.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony about this bill. Please let me know if you have any questions about what I have said here, or about homelessness research in general.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Marisa A. Zapata". The signature is fluid and cursive, with "Marisa" on the top line and "A. Zapata" on the bottom line.

Marisa A. Zapata, PhD
Director