**Guide to talking to your elected officials about declaring racism a**

**public health crisis in Oregon**

Identify your elected officials – [This website will help identify both your Representative and Senator in the State of Oregon](https://www.oregonlegislature.gov/FindYourLegislator/leg-districts.html). There you will also find contact information for your Representative and Senator.

Craft your message – Below are talking points used to develop the legislative concept and we suggest to help guide your conversation/message to your elected officials (Senator and Representative). We encourage you to make this message your own with the key messages below:

* Racism is pervasive and is integrated into every institution and system that is connected to the social determinants of health, and ultimately impacts Oregonian’s ability to be healthy and well to the fullest potential.
* Incidents of racism consistently experienced by Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) communities and Tribes create racial disparities in social, health, economic, legal, and academic outcomes
* White supremacy was institutionalized through the development of policies and systems that ensure power, privilege and resources remain in the hands of white men
* Racism in Oregon has left a legacy of trauma from one generation to the next, impacting Oregon Tribes and BIPOC communities through a cumulative effect
* Oregon has deep roots of racism to include the Land Donation Act of 1850 that made it legal to steal land from Native American Tribes, the 1887 murder of Chinese miners, Black exclusionary laws with lashing as punishment, Japanese internment camps during WWII, segregation in education, and real estate red-lining that drove down values and reduced home ownership in the Black community
* Racial justice requires the formation and purposeful reinforcement of policies, practices, ideologies and behaviors that create equitable power, access, opportunity, treatment, and outcomes for all people regardless of race and redistribute resources to invest where inequities are greatest
* Racism in Oregon and nationwide has created a situation that is untenable and where immediate action must be taken to mitigate further harm and violence against BIPOC Oregonians and Tribes.
* As public health professionals, we assert that this issue is not about politics. This issue is about people’s lives and their health, and the fact that people are dying far earlier than they should, and that we must do a much better job of preventing that.
* In Oregon African Americans and American Indians and Alaska Natives experienced more years of potential life lost (YPLL) than any other race and ethnicity in the state (Oregon Death Certificate Data, 2016).
* Chronic illness is greater for many communities of color. For example, African Americans (38.9%), Pacific Islanders (36.1%), American Indians and Alaska Natives (33.4%), and Latinos (29.1%) are more likely to experience high blood pressure in this state. (Oregon Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, Preliminary race reporting data file, 2015 – 2016).
* African American women are three to four times more likely to die from pregnancy-related complications, and people in rural areas of the U.S. are 64% more likely (Amnesty International, 2010).
* Communities of color are more likely to be uninsured (Oregon Health Insurance Survey, 2016).
* Racism is the reason that even when you control for educational attainment and income inequality that people of color still experience higher rates of health inequities and average years of life lost. (Colen, Ramey, Cooksey, Williams. (2018)
* Racial disparities in health among nonpoor African Americans and Hispanics: The role of acute and chronic discrimination. Social Science and Medicine, 199 (February 2018), p.167-180.
* Racism is the reason why COVID-19 has hit communities of color harder. In Oregon, Latinos represent nearly 40% of COVID-19 cases, despite the fact that they only comprise about 13% of the population. (Oregon Health Authority, 2020. COVID-19 Weekly Report: October 14, 2020).
* Black and brown people are stopped, searched, arrested, prosecuted, and experience more force and are killed by police at higher rates nationally. (APHA, 2018, Addressing law enforcement violence as a public health issue).
* As public health professionals we know that chronic stress, trauma, and violence not only impact physical wellbeing, but also has psychological implications. Studies have shown that discriminatory police stops are associated with negative mental health outcomes such as anxiety, depression, and posttraumatic stress disorder. (APHA, 2018, Addressing law enforcement violence as a public health issue).
* Health inequities are preventable issues that when addressed provide significant cost savings not only to health systems, but also other systems related to the social determinants of health. More importantly, addressing these issues of racism improves the health and quality of life for all Oregonians.

**Writing a letter to a legislator**

Use the proper salutation, for example:

Representative or Senator (first name) (last name)

Address

City, State, Zip code

Dear (Representative / Senator) (last name) *Be courteous & informative in your communication.*

State the purpose of the letter in the opening sentence and if you are referring to a bill, include the bill number, author and topic. If you live in the elected official’s district be sure to say this in the opening paragraph as well.

Focus on the message and key points. Personalize the letter by including examples of how the legislation might impact you and your family. Keep the letter brief – not more than one page.

Restate your request at the end of the letter, for example urging them to support or oppose the bill. Thank the legislator for his or her support and offer to address any questions that he or she might have. Be sure to include your contact information and sign the letter.

**Sending e-mail communication to a legislator**

The same guidelines apply to e-mail as to written letters. Before sending an e-mail, you might want to call the legislator’s office and ask if a letter sent by e-mail is effective. If you do send an e-mail, send it to the representative. Do not copy other representatives or send a mass e-mail. Make it a brief message with no special layouts or graphics. Do not include attachments.

Include your full name and address so it is clear that you are a constituent and ask for a response. You might also want to send a hard copy of your e-mail to the legislator.

**Phone calls to a legislator**

State your name and address and identify yourself as the legislator’s constituent. You will often be speaking with a secretary or aide. Briefly make known your position as they keep track of the issues that people call about to report to the legislator. Have your thoughts organized in advance, which will help you to keep the call brief and to the point. It is also very helpful to share how the issue affects you personally.

Thank them for their support.

**Example Letter**

For a Senator:

The Honorable (full name) State Senator (if to President, use President of the Senate)

900 Court St NE, (office number) Salem, OR, 97301

For a Representative:

The Honorable (full name) State Representative (if to Speaker, use Speaker of the House)

900 Court St NE, (office number) Salem, OR, 97301

RE: (state the topic or include the bill number, author and subject if you are writing to support or oppose a particular legislative bill)

Dear (Representative/Senator) (Last name):

My name is (your first and last name) and I am a (family member/service provider/advocate/community member) who resides in your district.

(State why you support or oppose the bill or other issue here. Choose up to three of the strongest points that support your position and state them clearly.)

(Include a personal story. Tell your representative why the issue is important to you and how it affects you, your family member and your community.)

(Tell your representative how you want her or him to vote on this issue and ask for a response. Be sure to include your name and address on both your letter and envelope.) (Thank them for their support)

Sincerely,

SIGN YOUR NAME

Print your name

Street address

City, State, Zip code