



PRESS RELEASE

OREGON HOUSE DEMOCRATS

For Immediate Release
June 3, 2021

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Oregon Legislators Call on Congress to Fix 13th Amendment, Implement Reparations for Black Americans

[Senate Joint Memorial 2](#) and [Senate Joint Memorial 4](#), urging Congress to take action on racial inequality in the United States, passed

SALEM, OR—Today, the Oregon House passed two Joint Memorials, urging Congress to work on two issues that are important to Black communities in the United States. [Senate Joint Memorial 2](#) calls on Congress to amend the 13th Amendment of the US Constitution, removing the provision allowing involuntary service or slavery for those convicted of a crime.

“Although the 13th amendment was passed in 1865 as a formal abolition of slavery, it has persisted in our country for over 150 years since within our justice system,” said [Rep. Wlnsvey Campos](#) (D-Aloha). “The inclusion of one line in the amendment—'except as punishment for a crime'—created a loophole that is still a tool of exploitation used by our Nation and State’s constitutions to enslave overwhelmingly black and brown bodies. Labor in our prison system can be an opportunity for adults in custody to learn real life skills, to serve this state as they work to repair the wrongs they have committed, and to be successful in re-entering their communities after their time is served. However, when labor is forced without or with far less pay than a non-incarcerated person, we diminish the dignity and status of adults in custody while capitalizing on generational injustices.”

According to the Federal Bureau of Prisons, over 38.4% of incarcerated Americans are Black, despite comprising only comprising 12.2% of the US population, resulting in an unpaid workforce where Black Americans are disproportionately represented, and indicating a racial bias in the criminal justice system which has existed since this country’s earliest days.

The second Joint Memorial, [Senate Joint Memorial 4](#), asks Congress to enact legislation to begin the process of implementing reparations for Black Americans impacted by slavery or discrimination.

Jeff Merkley co-sponsored [S.1083](#) in 2019, which would have created a commission to study proposals for reparations to Black Americans.

“I believe we can assert our values and send our support to our federal delegation,” said [Rep. Janelle Bynum](#) (D-Happy Valley). “And we can acknowledge the work we have to do here in our own backyard to remedying the atrocities of denying Black Oregonians access to capital, to real estate, to equal educational outcomes, to jobs and more.”

SJM 2 passed 39-19, while SJM 4 passed 35-23, along a partisan split. Both pieces of legislation now go to the legislative presiding officers for signature.

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