

May 2, 2022

Mr. Brent Leggs
Executive Director, African American Cultural Heritage Action Fund
National Trust for Historic Preservation
2600 Virginia Ave. NW, Suite 1000
Washington, DC 20037

Re. Support for AACHAF Grant Application: *Executive Director for the Billy Webb Elks Lodge #1050*

Dear Mr. Leggs:

As community partners, together on behalf of our organizations, we urge your support for \$150,000 in critical investment to help the Billy Webb Elks Lodge, a cornerstone of African American cultural heritage in Portland, Oregon, to hire its first staff member, a part-time Executive Director/Operations Manager. This support would provide the opportunity for recovery from a devastating fire and help ensure the long-term preservation of this irreplaceable community resource.

Please know that this is not *just* investment in a part time administrative position. The Billy Webb Elks Lodge (BWEL) is a singular and unique regional asset with deep historical, cultural, and functional significance that serves as a testament of the proud strength of African Americans in Oregon. In its 96-year history, the Billy Webb Elks Lodge has served the traditionally African American neighborhood of Albina as a Black YWCA, a USO center for black servicemen, a refuge for the large African American population displaced by the tragic Vanport flood of 1948, headquarters of the NAACP, designated meeting place for the Urban League of Portland and the Congress of Racial Equality, and as a Black Elks Lodge at a time when the Elks organization prohibited black membership.

Up until a fire set by trespassers in September 2021, the Elks used the building for community services and as a social and professional gathering place providing an environment that promotes safety, dignity, respect, and pride for people of color who have long and deep ties to the Albina community. The all-volunteer staff and board of BWEL #1050 does not have the capacity to fully administer the lodge's restoration, clean energy upgrades, *and* the execution of its newly-updated business plan without this funding and does not have a clear path to long-term solvency without it.

We recommend that grant funds be awarded to this Black history resource to ensure it remains a beacon of African American fellowship, culture, and resiliency in Oregon.

Thank you so much for your time and consideration,



Katelyn Van Genderen
Programs Director
Restore Oregon