



Lincoln County Health and Human Services Department
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Joint Ways and Means Subcommittee on Human Services
Testimony for SB 5526

Dear Co-Chairs Senator Bates and Representative Nathanson, and members of the Committee:

My name is Rebecca Austen and I am the Public Health Director at Lincoln County Health & Human Services. I am writing in support of additional investments in Public Health to help our community combat the number one cause of death, tobacco use; to help us build capacity in our State to meet the rising tide of communicable disease; and to ensure that we continue to prevent disease and injuries for everyone.

In order for Lincoln County to address its high use of tobacco, we have joined forces with Linn and Benton Counties to form a collaborative team that works hand in hand with IHN-CCO, Samaritan Health Services and primary care providers. The funding for this work is through the Tobacco Master Settlement dollars. Our goals include making policy changes to discourage smoking in public settings and addressing how retail outlets are marketing tobacco products to our children. We are coordinating with our primary care partners to address treatment for addictions to tobacco and educating our community on the health impacts. This is crucial work for Lincoln County as tobacco is our number one cause of illness and death. When the tobacco industry spends \$1 million a day on marketing tobacco products through their retail outlets, we cannot afford to let down our guard and be complacent when our 8th graders begin lighting up. The industry knows that they need to hook children to gain a life-long customer.

Also, in Lincoln County the trend of reportable communicable diseases (CD) is increasing and in the first two months of this year we are witnessing radical increases over last year. For the first time in many years we have had reports of Pertussis (Whooping Cough), Gonorrhea and Syphilis. We have been hard at work with infection control during flu season in some of our assisted living facilities. Health care providers across the County depend on our expertise to help them stop potential outbreaks. We are also witnessing more food borne illnesses, such as E coli O157. We have two part-time CD nurses to do

this work, and if we continue on this trajectory we will need to hire another. Yet, despite our small CD staff, current State and County funding is insufficient to meet the demands placed on this program. Lincoln County is a destination for people to vacation and relax, not get sick.

All this work must happen 24/7 every day of the year; we do not rest. We need support to maintain our expertise in these fields. Our health promotion experts, our CD nurses and our Environmental Health Specialists do an amazing job promoting, preventing and protecting the public's health. Now we need you to do your part. Support a budget that takes us forward: continues to appropriate the use of Tobacco Master Settlement dollars to prevent kids from using tobacco products; dedicates more dollars to stopping the spread of communicable diseases and foodborne illnesses; and send a clear message across the State that preventing disease, protecting the public and promoting health are Oregon priorities. As we enter Public Health Week, April 6-12 remember that we want to be the healthiest nation in one generation – 2030. The best return on your investment in is Public Health.

Thank you.

Rebecca C. Austen
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