

Human Services Sub-Committee of the Joint Committee on Ways and Means

Support for Public Health Funding in HB 5026

March 8, 2017

Co-chairs Senator Steiner Hayward and Representative Rayfield, and members of the committee,

My name is Katrina Rothenberger and I am the Public Health Administrator at Polk County Health Department. I am here today in support of needed investments in Oregon's public health system.

Local health departments focus on preparing for, preventing and responding to illnesses and injuries caused by a variety of factors including: infectious disease outbreaks, unhealthy behaviors like smoking and substance abuse, and natural disasters.

I would first like to share with you an example of infectious disease control funded with State Support Public Health. In December 2015, a child in Polk County was diagnosed with bacterial meningitis. This child attended day care and an event for kids and families with approximately 450 people. Children in the same class were instructed to seek prophylaxis at their primary care provider's office and those who attended the event were sent letters to watch for symptoms. Four nurses, one supervisor, one administrator and two office specialists all participated in the response to this event. Letters were translated from English to Spanish in a matter of hours and countless phone calls to providers and state officials were made. Response to this one instance required nearly 150 of staff hours. We worked tirelessly as a department and I am happy to report that there were no subsequent cases and the child with meningitis recovered nicely. This is public health in action. But it also means making tough decisions. Because this event took the time of nearly all of our staff, it meant that we had to cancel immunization and reproductive health appointments.

Diseases like meningitis and the resurgence of measles and mumps demonstrate the ongoing need for a strong public health system. Between 2008 and 2013, the number of disease reports in Oregon increased over 30% while funding to investigate and respond to those reports has decreased over 10%. While outbreaks are relatively rare the ongoing work to track infectious diseases are regular and on-going.

Lastly, you may remember reading about several mumps cases in Marion County late last year. The Marion County Communicable Disease team communicated with Polk County just prior to sending their blast fax to primary care and hospitals to inform providers of signs/symptoms and proper specimen collection. Because Marion County gave us this information, Polk County Public Health was able to alert primary care providers in Polk County. Two presumptive cases of mumps were then identified in Polk County, with one out of two turning out to be an actual mumps case. Marion and Polk Counties see the value in regular communication (a core public health modernization capability) as a strategy to improving the health of our communities.

The long-term health consequences from budget reductions will far outweigh the short-term savings. Thank you.