



March 8, 2017

Joint Committee on Ways and Means
Subcommittee on Human Services
Senator Steiner Hayword, Representative Rayfield and Committee Members

Re: HB 5026

I am here today to share information about public health services in Washington County and the importance of state funding to maintain these critical services.

Local public health is the unsung hero of the public safety network. You don't normally see an army of public health supporters at budget town halls because when we do a good job, ***nothing happens***. And it's not emotional or noteworthy for supporters to come out with signs saying thank you for inspecting restaurants so I can safely dine out or thank you for making sure my family didn't contract a communicable disease today! Public Health is essential but invisible.

Public health prevention activities also fly under the radar. Unlike our partners in health care, education and behavioral health we can't always point to the number of people who need our services, because everyone needs our services. And we can't always provide immediacy of outcomes because our work is often long term – like our efforts to reduce the prevalence of chronic diseases (such as heart disease and diabetes) that now account for 7 out of every 10 deaths each year. But we know that funding for prevention and protection is cost effective. Tobacco use costs Oregonians 2.5 billion a year in health care, lost productivity and premature death but each dollar spent on prevention saves more than \$4 in these costs over a smoker's lifetime. Additionally research has shown that higher local health department spending on food safety and facility sanitation activities was related to a lower incidence of restaurant related foodborne illness. Overall the return on investment for public health is estimated at \$67 to \$88 for every \$1 spent.

The funding provided to us by the Oregon Health Authority Public Health Division are part of resources we use to; quickly respond and contain foodborne outbreaks or influenza in schools or long-term care facilities, treat individuals with active tuberculosis, assure that children receive vaccinations and are protected from vaccine preventable diseases, assure that low-income children have a healthy start in life and work on efforts to reduce death and disability from tobacco addictions and second hand smoke. And even though this work may be invisible to some, these issues affect the health of all Oregon communities. Tobacco use is still the state's leading preventable cause of death and results in more than 7,000 premature deaths each year. And our county experiences over 40 disease outbreaks every year.



Washington County, like all other public health organizations, often has to figure out what it is the most urgent and pressing issue that needs our attention today. State funding cuts in the proposed budget are deep cuts to core foundational services which could mean; more community outbreaks of vaccine preventable diseases like mumps, measles and whooping cough, epidemics of syphilis and chlamydia will go unchecked, an increase in unplanned pregnancies and poor birth outcomes, and rising tobacco use rates among vulnerable populations including youth.

An example of how underfunded Washington County already is can be seen in our communicable disease prevention work. We currently receive approximately \$46,000 annually dedicated for tuberculosis control. But it costs Washington County over \$600,000 to provide these services. It is public health's responsibility to protect coworkers, classmates, shelter residents, inmates, family and friends when an individual with active tuberculosis is identified. Ensuring timely and accurate treatment is critical. And the lengthy treatment regimen seems unnecessary to patients as they begin to improve but if not adhered to closely could result in drug resistance. Although this specific issue may be somewhat unique to Washington County because of our demographics, the issue of limited funding is not at all unique to local public health agencies.

The proposed cuts to maternal and child health services are also troubling. Study after study has shown that preconception health, the prenatal period and birth to three represent some of the most critical periods for setting the life time health status of our nation's children. Washington County conducts over 5,000 visits annually to support women, infants and children with meeting their health and social service needs. Additionally, forty percent of pregnancies in Oregon are unintended. Cutting financial support for reproductive health services ultimately results in more financial costs for health care and social services.

Washington County has been fortunate to have developed six school based health centers (SBHC) that provide resources to every school district in our county. School based health centers aren't just about band aids and aspirin. They provide needed health services including well-child checks, immunizations and mental health services to vulnerable youth. In 2015 SBHC's provided over 23,000 immunizations. These centers are open and available during the school hours, reducing time missed from school. They are essential components of the safety net health care services for Washington County residents.

Over the past two years Oregon's Public Health system has been working on a plan to assure all residents have the needed public health services in their community. This plan details the work to be done and the resources needed to be **more proactive** and **less reactive** to emerging and imminent health threats. As we've all seen in the media, lead in our environment, air quality issues and diseases being transported across the globe challenge our public health systems due to lack of direct funding for these issues and overall limited funding for disease surveillance and prevention activities.



We understand that Oregon is facing many budget challenges this legislative session. But it can't be overlooked that there are cost savings that can be attained long term by investing in the public health system and there is an urgent need to develop a public health system across the state that protects the health of all. Washington County Public Health and our partners urge the legislature to maintain our current funding and work with us to look for future funding to further improve the public health system.

Sincerely,

Tricia Mortell

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