



County of Malheur

HEALTH DEPARTMENT

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House Committee on Health Care

Support House Bill 2310 – Implementing Public Health Modernization

Oregon's 34 local public health departments focus on protecting children and families by preparing for, preventing and responding to illnesses and injuries caused by a variety of factors. We are submitting this letter to support HB 2310 and funding to implement the first phase of Public Health Modernization

Malheur County Health Department supports HB 2310 with an amendment that will include the recommendations for 2017-19 implementation made by the Public Health Advisory Board to implement aspects of the Communicable Disease and Environmental Health Foundational Programs and Assessment and Epidemiology, Leadership, and Health Equity Foundation Capabilities. These areas build on current capacity with a focus on greater accountability to improving health outcomes.

To do this, Oregon's public health system needs funding. We simply cannot afford to leave our public health departments underfunded and without adequate public health infrastructure until a horrific epidemic, disaster or outbreak occurs. Supporting public health will ensure fair opportunities for health and eliminate gaps in health outcomes, slow the spread of Chlamydia, gonorrhea and syphilis and other communicable diseases, improve childhood immunization rates, and increase community capacity to identify and respond to environmental health hazards.

Redefining and expanding the work and expectations of public health can help improve the conditions that create opportunities for health. In Malheur County, in a normal year, our categorical grant funds and county general fund are just enough to meet our work requirements to remain in compliance with our funders. However, if the county experiences a financial hardship—as it did this year with massive unexpected costs including a particularly severe winter—we find ourselves hard pressed to sustain the minimum required work. State support for public health modernization would provide an essential foundation for infrastructure to fill in the gaps and allow the flexibility to meet unexpected demands and proactively address community health problems.

One way this would work would be allowing us capacity to conduct consistent cultivation of existing relationships between public health and other community agencies that impact public health, and to forge new relationships for protection and promotion of health in Malheur County. This would benefit the community in several ways. For example, we are currently experiencing a syphilis outbreak, and due to our capacity limitations, we are reacting to the situation. With increased capacity in communicable disease we would be able to proactively communicate with the public and community organizations to increase awareness and work on prevention. Likewise, we could work with our Environmental Health Department to provide proactive outreach and education about risk for environmental lead rather than reacting when a child tests positive for high blood lead levels.

Support for assessment and epidemiology would allow us to gather more detailed data at the local level to help us determine how well our services and messages are reaching different members of the community and determine who we need to reach better; it could also shed light on where health disparities exist within our county, which is essential knowledge for working toward equity.

Support in leadership and organization would provide for a strong infrastructure to guide proactive efforts in communication with other community organizations, leadership bodies, and the public, including those who have historically been left out or underrepresented. It would allow for the flexibility to more seamlessly integrate our public health programs with each other, as well as with other programs and initiatives that operate in the county.

The work of Oregon's local public health departments is essential to the health of communities across our state. Malheur County Health Department urges your support of house bill 2310.

Sincerely,



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