



COALITION OF LOCAL HEALTH OFFICIALS

**Support House Bill 2310 – Implementing Public Health Modernization
House Committee on Health Care
April 7, 2017**

Chair Greenlick, Vice-Chairs Hayden and Nosse, and Committee Members,

My name is Charlie Fautin, I am the Health Administrator for Benton County Health Department, and chair of the Coalition of Local Health Officials (CLHO). I am testifying today in support of House Bill 2310 with an amendment critical for successful initiation of Oregon's long-needed Public Health Modernization.

An amendment requested will include the first phase-in of public health Modernization in 2017-19. The areas to begin implementing will be select statutes of Communicable Disease and Environmental Health Foundational Programs and Health Equity, Assessment and Epidemiology and Leadership Foundational Capabilities. While we can envision the Modern approach with our current systems, actually implementing and tracking outcomes for these new statutory requirements will require additional state investments.

A Modernized Oregon public health system will be able to work on core public health issues more efficiently across County lines and with health systems, Coordinated Care Organizations and early learning hubs. Communicable Disease prevention, investigation, response is one of the first Foundational programs we can begin implementing in 2017-19.

In Benton County, communicable disease reports increased 50% between 2009 and 2016 while state general fund financial support remained virtually level, personnel costs continued to increase at a double-digit rate. Because of local funding which now provides over half of the Communicable Disease program costs, I have been able to preserve a bare-bones staff of just two nurses. The difference from 2009 is that those two nurses must now spend all of their time responding to and investigating disease reports, while they used to be able to work directly with schools, businesses, nursing homes and others to educate and provide technical assistance aimed at preventing infectious diseases before they happen. Preventive community outreach and engagement are key elements of a Modernized communicable disease program. .

Unlike responses to some other disasters, there is no FEMA or other emergency funding available for local communicable disease outbreaks such as meningococcal disease which is currently impacting my jurisdiction and department. All of the hours and costs of an outbreak response represent "lost opportunities" of time and effort that could have been used helping to prevent other health threats. Those lost opportunities can never be recouped – but are manifested in the form of greater spread of gonorrhea, syphilis, or other rapidly-increasing illnesses.



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The 2015 statewide Modernization assessment revealed that Oregon's 34 local health departments currently have just over 41% of necessary communicable disease staffing. Because of local funding, Benton County has a bit more, but still faces a shortfall of over \$233,000 per year to meet the criteria of a fully Modernized Communicable Disease program.

In addition to providing capacity for renewed prevention work in schools and businesses, the additional resources would enable us to fulfill unmet needs for educating the medical community about emerging disease threats, to analyze local trends and patterns in order to better recognize threats, to improve direct communication with the increasingly diverse population to help them recognize and prevent illnesses, and - perhaps most importantly - to develop improved collaborative networks and implement more efficient service models with our colleagues in other counties.

Local public health departments are the front lines for protecting Oregon's entire population by preparing for, preventing and responding to illnesses and injuries. My county is contributing all it can, but additional state resources are needed not only to fulfill current mandates, but to meet the growing and changing challenges of the 21st century.

The work of all 34 of Oregon's local public health departments is essential to the health of Benton County and to communities across our state. I urge your support of House Bill 2310.

Respectfully,
Charlie Fautin RN, MPH
Chair, Oregon Coalition of Local Health Officials (CLHO)



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