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TO: The Honorable Andrea Salinas, Chair
            House Health Care Committee

FROM: Katrina Hedberg
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SUBJECT: SB 253

Chair Salinas and members of the committee, I am Dr. Katrina Hedberg, Health Officer and State Epidemiologist for Public Health Division of the Oregon Health Authority. I am here to speak in support of Senate Bill 253, which updates the public health statutes to clarify the process for transferring local public health authority responsibilities to the Oregon Health Authority (OHA). In addition, the bill gives local public health authorities more flexibility in how they staff their health officer position. Finally, the bill clarifies the process for transferring local public health authority responsibilities from OHA back to a local governing body.

In 2015, the state legislature passed HB 3100, which significantly revised the public health statutes to put us on the path to modernizing Oregon's public health system. A modern public health system ensures that critical public health protections are in place for every person in Oregon, the public health system is prepared and has the right resources to address emerging health threats, and the public health system is engaged to eliminate health disparities. That bill outlined the process for the transfer of local public health authority responsibilities to the Oregon Health Authority.

In spring 2018, Wallowa County adopted an ordinance to transfer its local public health authority responsibilities to the Oregon Health Authority. This transfer was the first to take place under the revised public health statutes. Based on lessons learned from the Wallowa transfer experience, SB 253 makes minor changes to clarify the transfer process.

SB 253 would allow the state public health officer to appoint a local public health officer for a county that has transferred its local public health authority responsibilities to the state. During a public health emergency or a communicable disease outbreak, this may be necessary to protect the public's health.

SB 253 also permits the Oregon Health Authority to agree to an earlier transfer date. Current statute states that a transfer of authority is effective 180 days after the county governing body adopts the transfer ordinance. Because of the circumstance of the Wallow transfer, the Oregon Health Authority had to act as the local public health authority several weeks after the ordinance was adopted, but legally the transfer did not occur until 180 days after the ordinance. This minor statutory change will help ensure basic public health protections are in place for Oregonians and creates flexibility for local public health authorities in determining their transfer timeline.

SB 253 allows local public health authorities more flexibility in staffing the public health officer role. Currently, if a local public health administrator is a licensed physician in Oregon, s/he must serve as the local public health officer. SB 253 removes this requirement, giving local public health authorities greater flexibility in their staffing models as they modernize to improve community health outcomes.

Finally, SB 253 establishes in statute the process by which a local public health authority can initiate and complete the return of local public health authority responsibilities back from OHA. Once return is requested, OHA and the local public health authority will agree on a plan and timeline for the return, and the local public health authority can repeal the ordinance or resolution that transferred responsibility to OHA.

In summary, SB 253 puts forward minor changes to the public health statutes to better support Oregon's public health system in assuring basic public health protections for all people in Oregon.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I am happy to answer any questions.