



Health Department

February 9, 2021

Joint Subcommittee on Human Services
900 Court St. NE - Remote 174
Salem, Oregon 97301

Re: HB 5024 - Appropriates moneys from General Fund to Oregon Health Authority for certain biennial expenses.

Co-Chairs Lieber and Nosse, and members of the Committee, my name is Jessica Guernsey and I am the Public Health Director and Local Public Health Administrator for Multnomah County. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of additional investments in Public Health to ensure local public health authorities have capacity to address communicable disease and environmental health threats and prevent the leading causes of death and disease in Oregon. I am here to support a \$69 million investment in Public Health Modernization in the OHA Agency Request Budget, HB 5024.

We join the State in working to eliminate health inequities by 2030. To reach this goal, Public Health needs significant resources to dismantle systemically-driven racial disparities and inequities, focusing on our most-impacted communities.

In addition, the pandemic has demonstrated how decades of underfunding Public Health left us vulnerable to a deadly virus, and we are not yet out of danger. We need strategic funding to continue fighting the pandemic, and then to rebuild and recover.

Emerging environmental health threats take a tremendous toll on our community members, as well, from forest fires, climate change, vector and water borne diseases, and related injuries.

Significant funding to support Public Health modernization means everyone can expect basic public protections critical to their health and the health of future generations--to have clean air, safe food and water, health promotion and disease prevention, and response to new health threats.

We have made significant steps with the previously allocated modernization funding, including prioritizing our informatics infrastructure to allow us to harness multiple data sources to track the local impact of a global pandemic and guide local policy makers. In addition, we have started to advance how we access, manage, and use communicable

disease data. We have worked hard to rebuild trust with our community partners by rebuilding the foundation for bidirectional leadership around the collection and use of data. We have been mindful not to further stigmatize or traumatize already marginalized communities and to acknowledge historical amnesia from those of us in power. Listening and collaborating with our communities strengthens our ability to decolonize and indigenize data across the continuum of public health.

We need these additional funds to provide local public health, state public health, community based organizations, and Tribal Health Authorities resources to increase capacity to broaden our outreach and better engage communities to work together. With increased funding, for example in Environmental Health, our teams could strategically advise transportation agencies on ways to reduce greenhouse gas co-pollutants in environmental justice communities. During wildfire season, we could distribute air filtration resources to Healthy Birth Initiative clients, reducing asthma symptoms and crises. Over time, we could study the data showing health impacts from wildfire smoke.

When our community members are vulnerable due to chronic disease and injury, they and the entire community pay the cost in loss of well-being and in medical and emergency treatment. Investment in Public Health helps reduce spending taxpayer dollars in treatment and emergency response. When we live in healthier neighborhoods with necessary supports, we thrive.

We cannot continue supporting a status quo that systematically burdens our BIPOC community members, our elders, and our most vulnerable with health inequities. We need you to advocate for the \$69 million in funding to continue implementing the Public Health Modernization model the legislature adopted in 2015 to improve health outcomes and health and well-being for all Oregonians.

Thank you for your time and I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

Thank you,

Jessica Guernsey
Public Health Director
Multnomah County Health Department