

Multnomah County Public Health Advisory Board

Membership

Becca Brownlee, Chair
Hanna Atenafu, Vice-Chair
Cheryl Carter
Bernal Cruz
Timur Ender
Bertha Ferran
Suzanne Hansche
Laurel Ann Hansen
Mahad Hassan
Rebecca Lavelle-Register
Maher Lazeg
Alyshia Macaysa
Debbie McKissack
Daniel Morris
Ryan Petteway
Maribel Reyes
Joannie Tang
Yamungu Seraya

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 Hanna Atenafu. I am vice-chair of the Multnomah County Public Health Advisory Board (MCPHAB). At my job, I provide direct services through the Early Head Start program.

Today I would like to share my support for the initial OHA request of \$69 million for investments in Modernization of Public Health and tell you that MCPHAB considers a budget allocation at this level one of the most important budget allocations of the biennium. It is fundamental to honoring the promises made to the people of Oregon in the current state health improvement plan [Healthier Together Oregon](#) adopted in 2020 and to meeting the State promise to eliminate health inequities by 2030.

As a country, we have witnessed first-hand an array of pandemics that have amplified racial disparities and disadvantages, in part caused by an unmodern public health system. We must prioritize the health and safety of the public and work collectively to dismantle racism and systemic barriers to improve the quality of life for Oregonians.

As a service provider, the biggest barrier to service delivery is the lack of equitable funding. This limits our ability to provide and sustain services for communities facing intergenerational traumas and pandemics. The needs are too high. The best course of action is to move upstream and ensure that our frameworks and systems are in alignment. And the state made that commitment when it adopted the Statewide Public Health Modernization Plan in December 2016.

Contact

Nathan Wickstrom
Multnomah County
Health Department
619 NW 6th Ave
Portland, OR 97209

(503) 307-9725

We are concerned that the Governor's recommended allocation of \$30 million will not be enough for us to produce a stabilized, equitable, and just public health system. Financial investment in public health is critical--especially in this time of revitalizing and strengthening communities across the state who have suffered during the pandemic.

My colleagues on the Multnomah County Public Health Advisory Board and I take our roles seriously in representing the voice of our communities. It is a heartbreaking job during this pandemic, when we witness our state and local public health authorities, despite their best efforts, selectively prioritizing who will receive scarce resources because our public health system remains under-resourced and under-prepared to meet the challenges of the day and unable to meet the full range of urgent needs presented by our most vulnerable residents.

As stated in the full [modernization assessment report](#), it was estimated that "***an additional \$105M annually is needed to fully implement a modernized public health system***". Oregon to date has devoted \$15 million toward investments in Modernization of Public Health -- and has achieved some important outcomes as a result.

In the end, state budgets are compromising configurations of resources, urgent needs, and priorities. Oregon can no longer wait to make the substantial yet compromising investment represented by the \$69 million OHA request in the hopes that pandemics and wildfires will not reach our state and impact Oregonians. In order to recover after such events and provide sufficient, stable, sustainable, resilient, just and equitable public health protections and services to the people of Oregon tomorrow, OHA must be vested to make significant and meaningful investments now.

We appreciate your leadership and devotion in supporting the public interest. We hope that you fight for the betterment of Oregonians by supporting the full \$69 million investment in Public Health Modernization. MCPHAB will continue to support this work and lead with community wisdom. We appreciate your time and consideration in listening to our concerns.

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

Thanks,

Hanna Atenafu
Multnomah County Public Health Advisory Board Vice-Chair