

April 17, 2021

Heather Friend
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Dear state representative and senate members of the Joint Committee,

First, thank you for taking the time to read my testimony. I understand there are many needs in the state, though I hope you will take to heart the needs in rural southern Oregon. I am a Rogue River Wellness Center Steering Committee member working to bring a Federally Qualified Health Center and early childcare center to the area of Rogue River. I am a family nurse practitioner at La Clinica in Medford and have worked hard throughout the pandemic providing equitable care to our most vulnerable citizens. My statements do not represent La Clinica today though my background is important to note. I am also near the finish line of a doctorate degree focused heavily on health care quality improvement and policy change. I am rural Rogue River resident and well versed in the unmet needs of this area. I am asking for your support to fund a 3 million dollar build for this new facility with funds from SB 5555 general funds or another state resource.

The Rogue River area is home to approximately 12,000 people including many seniors, migrant and agricultural workers, and low income or houseless families. Prior to the pandemic, about 70% did not have adequate primary care. Additionally, mental health and substance use support, prenatal care, and pediatrics are falling significantly. I have no doubt this has worsened. Rogue River is designated as medically UNDERSERVED and as a health professional shortage area per the Governor. In addition, Rogue River School district is the ONLY district in Jackson County without a health clinic. In the last five years, Rogue River ranked in the top ten for worst mortality ratios per capita in the state! This is a true indicator of great need. Many of our citizens have very high comorbid medical issues and are quickly aging. A recent unmet needs report from 2020 completely underestimates the needs here. This is based on inaccurate time to clinic which declares this as a 10 minute drive for our residents. This is simply not true. This report assumes the single maxed-out Rogue River clinic is seeing all of these people. In truth, this clinic does not take the ONLY Jackson county Oregon Health Plan, Jackson Care Connect, nor do they address social disparities or have reasonable options for uninsured. Additionally, insurance programs do not commonly allow patients to jump county lines (Grants Pass is closer) which this report assumes. Time to care is actually 30-45 minutes minimum. This is a serious hardship for our low-income residents.

I have spent countless hours working with a team of highly motivated people, putting together an idea to help our community. I ask that you support our community. Please address this human issue in the heart of rural Oregon. Fund the build which would house the FQHC allowing options for OHP and uninsured residents, providing primary care, substance use assistance and mental health care by experienced providers, and school-based resources as well as a 0-3 year old innovative child care facility which is also lacking in our area.

I greatly appreciate your service and time and I hope you will consider this important ask.

In health,

Heather M. Friend, FNP-C