



Date: March 23, 2023

To: Joint Committee on Ways and Means - Human Services Subcommittee

From: Creating Opportunities

RE: Support SB 5525

Dear Co-Chair Campos, Co-Chair Valderrama, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Cheryl Cisneros, Executive Director of Creating Opportunities, a Community-Based Organization (CBO) for children and adults with developmental disabilities and/or mental health challenges and their families in Marion, Polk & Yamhill Counties. We work to strengthen families through support, information, advocacy, and to strengthen communities through awareness and collaboration.

Our CBO includes people who have familial roots in various parts of the world, follow different faiths, are LGBTQIA2S+, are people of color, tribal community members, documented and undocumented immigrants, experience poverty, and live in rural communities. We celebrate the beautiful diversity of the families that are a part of our organization and as we work to address the harsh realities of systemic and interpersonal discrimination that they face every day.

Since July 2020, we have been proud to work in partnership with the Oregon Health Authority to provide community outreach information regarding the COVID-19 pandemic, promote prevention strategies such as vaccines, and to provide direct wrap-around services for hundreds of families who have needed quarantine and housing stability supports. We have also had the honor of implementing several health equity initiatives in partnership with OHA over the past two and half years, including the following:

- Distribution of PPE (face masks, specialty shields and no-contact thermometers), vaccine promotional items and COVID testing kits.
- Safari-Themed Drive-Thru Resource Fair & Sensory-Friendly Vaccine Clinic.
- Northwest Family Outdoor Adventure Day featuring wilderness survival kits and activities.
- Preparing for a Medical Emergency Workshops along with Essential Care Bags with to equip families for trips to the ER or Hospital.
- Safe & Secure Summit focused on emergency preparedness and crisis prevention.
- Cooking Safely Together Workshops & Video along with Kitchen Safety Kits for families.
- Health & housing surveys and planning groups to address inequities experienced by people with developmental disabilities and behavioral health challenges and their families.
- In-home tutoring furnished for children with disabilities struggling to access educational activities remotely during school closures.

We appreciate that the Oregon Health Authority values CBOs as essential partners in the public health system and recognizes the important role that lived experience and peer-delivered supports has in rebuilding trust in communities who have endured persistent discrimination and marginalization. Health equity funding granted through OHA allowed us, and more than 170 other CBOs, to reach the most vulnerable members of our communities during the pandemic, wildfires, and ice storms, and swiftly respond to their individual needs.

I want to also take this opportunity to publicly express appreciation for the leadership of Dolly England, the Community Engagement Program Manager with Public Health Division at OHA. While the public health emergencies were relentless, so was the support that Dolly and her dedicated team of Community Engagement Coordinators who guide the work of the CBOs. In the darkest of days at the height of the pandemic, Dolly and her team has consistently provided encouragement, reminders to care for ourselves and provided information and tools needed to do our best possible work. These state agency employees represent the best of what government can do strengthen our communities, and we are proud to partner with them.

While the Governor's budget proposal reflected an additional investment of \$50M above current service level and Ways & Means Co-Chairs specifically mentioned "Important investments that remain in the 2023-25 current service level budget include: \$62.5 million General Fund for modernization of the state's public health system" in their Budget Framework released today, we are asking that you will put forth a recommendation in support of SB 5525 with the additional investment of \$286M above current service level, including an additional \$100M to support the health equity work being done by Oregon's community-based organizations as outlined in Policy Option Package 406.

With Gratitude – Cheryl Cisneros

Creating Opportunities, Community Based Organization
Member of the Community Health Equity Coalition