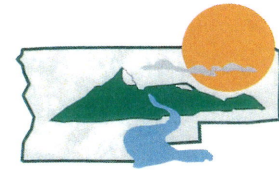


# JEFFERSON COUNTY PUBLIC HEALTH



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May 3, 2023

Joint Committee on Ways and Means  
900 Court Street NE  
Salem, Oregon, 97301

RE: Re: Support of Capitol Fund Request for Jefferson County-COCC Early Childhood  
Education and Health Careers Center

Dear Co-Chair Steiner, Co-Chair Sanchez and honorable committee members;

My name is Michael Baker, and I am the Health Services Director with Jefferson County Public Health. First, I would like to thank you for this opportunity to provide written testimony in support of the Capital Fund Request for Jefferson County. The support from this committee for \$5 million for a capital construction project for Jefferson County and Central Oregon Community College (COCC) will have serious impacts in addressing many of the health inequities experienced by our rural communities.


Since 2011, and the creation of The County Rankings (a partnership between the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation), Jefferson County has ranked last, or nearly last, in both Health Factors and Health Outcomes in the State of Oregon. Some of the key areas that continue to have generational health impacts are; a provider to patient ratio of nearly double the state as a whole, 1½ times the rate of children living in poverty, a higher percentage of single-parent head of households, overall low health literacy, and lack of educational access where just 1 in 4 choose (or are able to) pursue additional education after high school. The Jefferson County and Central Oregon Community College (COCC) capital construction project will directly address these issues with a single investment.

From a Public Health perspective, the increased opportunities to educate and train nursing students, nursing assistants, and medical assistants will have an immediate impact on our local communities. Research has shown that access to education, specifically local access, will result in improvements of overall health status as well as promote health equity. This local access can also result in increasing the local economy's health by reducing healthcare spending and lost productivity due to preventing and managing illnesses. Additionally, increasing the healthcare workforce will result in an increase in health literacy. Low health literacy is a strong predictor for low health status. Therefore, increasing the number of local health care professionals can help to ensure that health information and messaging can be delivered and reinforced in a way that is understood by all local residents.

When considering the rural geography of Jefferson County, the ability to recruit or retain healthcare workers continues to be a barrier to overcoming health inequities. Healthcare research at all levels highlights the importance of recruiting at the local level or within similar rural communities to ensure a workforce that understands the local social, economic, and health issues impacting the community. For Jefferson County, this is essential in order to ensure healthcare providers are able to provide culturally appropriate services in our diverse community. Once again, this one project will address these issues.

Thank you again and for your consideration in supporting the Jefferson County-COCC Early Childhood Education and Health Careers Center.

Respectfully,

  
Michael K. Baker, PhD, MsPH, CEHS/RS



Public Health  
Prevent. Promote. Protect.