



Testimony on HB 5201
Marc C. Johnson, President, Nehalem Bay Health District
Wheeler, Oregon
February 16, 2024

Representative Holvey and Senator Girod, members of the subcommittee

My name is Marc Johnson, and I am the president of the Nehalem Bay Health District located in rural north Tillamook County.

We seek funding – a \$2 million request – for a critically important workforce housing project that will be located in Wheeler, Oregon, an area chronically short of housing for the community’s workforce, particularly health care and other essential workers.

In one fell swoop we are addressing economic development, workforce housing and making dramatic improvements in local health and senior care.

The state funding we request will immediately leverage existing Health District funding that includes a \$10.25 million General Obligation bond measure that our small community overwhelmingly supported in 2023, \$3 million in congressionally directed funding that was supported by the Oregon delegation in 2022, and an additional \$750,000 in federal, state and private grants.

With this funding we are in the process of comprehensively addressing local health and senior care and workforce housing. Our plan involves construction a new community Health Center and Pharmacy, renovating the community’s skilled nursing facility – the only facility of its kind on the Oregon coast between Astoria and Newport – and developing workforce housing for health care and other essential workers.

State funding will jump start the housing component of our strategy, allowing us to immediately repurpose brownfield property currently occupied by a decrepit, no longer used hospital.

Business Oregon has provide funding related to hazardous materials in the old building and we have a plan in place to mitigate those materials. State funding will permit site preparation and needed infrastructure improvements, including extending water, sewer and powerlines. The property we plan to redevelop is zoned for residential development and the city of Wheeler has been an active partner with our Health District.

In close cooperation with Tillamook County’s Housing Commission we have identified developers who are qualified and willing to help our Health District advance this project.

I want to underscore that state funding will move this project from concept to reality.

The Nehalem Bay Health District is the smallest health district in Oregon with also some of the biggest community needs. Our existing skilled nursing facility and community clinic employ approximately 80 health care workers, yet nearly none of these workers live close to where they attend to the needs of primary health and senior care patients. Many of our workers commute hundreds of miles each week to get to their jobs.

State funding will help create up to 25 new housing units for current and future health care workers, and in the process help preserve those 80 vital jobs and the health care services they support on the rural north coast. With your help we can make rural housing happen – quickly – in north Tillamook County.

Separately I have submitted a packet of letters of support from some of our community partners – the Neah-Kae-Nie School District, Care of Tillamook, the cities of Wheeler, Nehalem and Manzanita, Tillamook Bay Community College, Columbia Pacific CCO and the Emergency Volunteer Corps of Nehalem Bay.

Thank you for your consideration.