

Dear Co-Chairs and Members of the Joint Human Services Ways & Means Committee:

Written Testimony of Cassandra Toombs
Director of Public Health Support Services
Eastern Oregon Center for Independent Living (EOCIL)

Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Cassandra Toombs, and I serve as the Director of Public Health Support Services at the Eastern Oregon Center for Independent Living (EOCIL).

Oregon's public health system is a collaboration of federal, state, county, and local agencies, alongside private organizations, community-based organizations (CBOs), and other partners. EOCIL is one of 195 CBOs that receive Public Health Modernization funding through the Oregon Health Authority (OHA).

As essential partners in the public health system, CBOs work to reduce health risks and improve health outcomes. We play a critical role in strengthening the state's ability to respond to emerging public health challenges. Because CBOs are trusted within their local communities, we are uniquely positioned to serve rural residents, people with disabilities, tribal members, and other culturally specific groups who face significant health disparities.

EOCIL's Public Health Modernization work has had a measurable impact on the communities we serve. Some of our key initiatives include:

- Providing a mobile mammogram bus that has served low-income families.
- Partnering with organizations to address commercial tobacco use.
- Establishing food pantries that have provided meals to 6,000 families.
- Developing community gardens, tree planting campaigns, and healing pathways to support behavioral health.

Without these services, many Oregonians—particularly those in underserved and underrepresented communities—would face even greater barriers to accessing essential public health resources.

OHA's current Public Health Modernization budget is \$110 million from the General Fund. This funding is crucial for Local Public Health Authorities, Tribal partners, OHA, and CBOs like ours, which work in close collaboration with the state. Since the pandemic, Oregon's public health system has been rebuilding its capacity to meet ongoing health needs, but significant challenges remain. Threats to our health and well-being continue, requiring sustained and expanded investment.

We are requesting an additional \$25 million for the Public Health Modernization budget. The \$2 million proposed in the Governor's recommended budget falls short of what is truly needed to address the unmet public health needs in our state. Key areas requiring urgent funding include addressing food insecurity and responding to the impacts of climate change.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this important investment in Oregon's public health infrastructure. I appreciate the opportunity to share the critical work we are doing in communities across the state.