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MARION COUNTY HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

February 19, 2025

Co-Chairs Campos and Valderrama, members of the committee, my name is Katrina Griffith, and I serve as the Deputy Director for Marion County Health and Human Services.

Marion County is facing a worsening public health crisis - alarming increases of syphilis rates, including congenital syphilis, which has devastating consequences for newborns. Our rates of syphilis have surged by 22% in just one year, rising to 78.5 per 100,000 residents in 2024 – outpacing the state and leaving our community at heightened risk. The impact is not just numbers on a page – it is babies born with severe birth defects, irreversible neurological damage, and in the worse cases, not surviving their first days of life.

The most heartbreaking reality? Every single one of these cases was preventable.

Prior to 2024, Marion County’s congenital syphilis rate stood at **1.5 cases per 1,000 live births**—already concerning. **This year, that number has jumped to 2.6 per 1,000—representing a 66.7% increase in just two years.** That means **10 babies in our county were born with syphilis in 2024 alone**—10 families facing heartbreak that could have been avoided with timely intervention. Additionally, since 2019, Marion County has seen two stillbirths related to congenital syphilis. Prior to 2019, Oregon had not seen a stillbirth due to syphilis in almost a decade.

Public health funding is the difference between **stopping this crisis now** or allowing it to spiral further. With increased funding, we can:

- Expand **provider education and outreach** to ensure presumptive treatment of syphilis at its most infectious stages.
- Increase **early detection and prenatal care access** to prevent congenital transmission.
- Strengthen **our field teams** to reach vulnerable populations facing barriers such as homelessness, substance use, and stigma.
- Develop **faster, data-driven interventions** to get treatment to those who need it most.

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The cost of inaction is staggering. **Treating congenital syphilis is exponentially more expensive than preventing it.** Hospitalizations, lifelong disabilities, and emergency interventions will far outweigh the cost of expanding public health programs. Investing in prevention **is not just the right thing to do—it is the fiscally responsible choice.**

Without this funding, more babies will be born into suffering. More families will face the unthinkable loss of an infant. **We have the tools to stop this—what we need is the investment to act now.**

I urge you to support this \$25 million increase in public health funding. **Every dollar we invest today is a life we can save tomorrow.**

Not read aloud

Data Disclaimer Data is provisional and may be subject to change. Differences between local, state, and national reports may exist due to timing of when reports are run, and definitions used. Rates are unadjusted.

Data Citations:

1. Oregon Health Authority. Oregon Public Health Epidemiologist User System (ORPHEUS). (Various). https://www.oregon.gov/oha/PH/DISEASES/CONDITIONS/COMMUNICABLE_DISEASE/REPORTING/COMMUNICABLE_DISEASE/Pages/Orpheus.aspx (Viewed:02/13/2025)
2. Oregon Health Authority. Oregon Public Health Assessment Tool (OPHAT).(Various). <https://ophat.public.health.oregon.gov> (Viewed 02/12/2025).

Thank you,

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