



To: Chair Representative Rob Nosse, Vice-Chairs Representative Cyrus Javadi and Representative Travis Nelson, and Members of the Oregon Legislative Assembly House Committee on Behavioral Health and Health Care

March 18, 2025

Chair Nosse and members of the committee, on of the behalf of the Washington County Public Health Advisory Council, thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of House Bill 3916 which provides funding for developing the local public health workforce in Oregon.

The public health field works behind the scenes every day to protect our communities and ensure everyone has the opportunity for a healthy life. Whether that is making sure you have clean water to drink, connecting vulnerable people in the community to resources, or tracking and preventing the spread of infectious diseases, local public health authorities like Washington County Public Health Division serve their communities in unseen yet critical areas.

However, this work isn't possible without a skilled and supported workforce. Public health is powered by people – environmental health specialists who can test water quality, traditional health workers who can connect and build trust with the community, and epidemiologists who can analyze data and understand how diseases spread. Without these trained professionals, the public health system does not work. A 2023 study published in Health Affairs paints a grim picture: nearly half of the governmental public health workforce left their positions between 2017 and 2021, and that trend shows no signs of slowing.

To ensure Oregon's public health system can provide essential protections and services to our communities, we must invest in the workforce. House Bill 3916 would provide \$5 million to build workforce development programs to help train, recruit, and retain the public health workforce. These programs would be able to offer financial support – including scholarships, loan repayment, coverage for licensing fees, childcare, and more – for recent graduates and professionals seeking additional training. This type of support not only enhances the skills of the current public health workforce but enables a new generation of public health professionals to pursue training while serving their communities. Increasing opportunities like this is vital to ensuring a competent and skilled public health workforce able to serve our communities across the state.

We urge you to support Oregon's public health system by investing in its workforce. Support House Bill 3916 to ensure we have a robust, skilled public health workforce that can ensure all people in Oregon have the opportunity for a healthy life.