



Josephine County, Oregon

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PUBLIC TESTIMONY PRESENTED TO THE JOINT COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS SUBCOMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES 04/02/2015

Good morning Co-Chairs Senator Bates, Representative Nathanson, and distinguished members of the Subcommittee. For the record, my name is Diane Hoover, and I am the Public Health Director in Josephine County, Oregon.

I am here today in support of maintaining current public health funding and additional public health funding to ensure that local public health is able to protect the safety of our communities and prevent the leading causes of death and disease for all Oregonians.

As you may know, Josephine County faces significant economic challenges. We have worked to identify efficiencies and fostered new partnerships to ensure the success of our Public Health Department. Part of our success has been due, in no small measure, to the successful public private partnerships that have been forged with local Coordinated Care Organizations. For example, in the 2012-2013 fiscal year I was facing serious staffing cuts due to declining general fund support. The Allcare CCO, in recognition of the value of public health, provided a one-year grant of \$171,000 to keep community services at status quo levels. Since then, Allcare and the Public Health Department have continued to partner to improve health care access and outcomes for vulnerable populations within our rural county.

Those successes notwithstanding, there are some Public Health Services that are inherently governmental and should only be provided by governmental Public Health Departments and clinically competent staff. Communicable disease investigation and surveillance is one of these services that is vital to the health and safety of a community. Due to fiscal constraints, small departments like ours are staffed at levels where we are at risk for single point critical mission failure for appropriate communicable disease investigation. To give you a sense of volume and scope, from April 2014 through March 2015, the Josephine County Health Department investigated 581 reportable diseases ranging from 167 cases of Hepatitis C, 294 sexually transmitted diseases, 12 cases of Salmonella, 7 cases of Pertussis and 45 animal bites. That the department has been able to appropriately prioritize, investigate and report communicable diseases is testimony to the high caliber of nurses who choose to serve their community in the Public Health Department. However, due to lack of funding, we have been unable to obtain the talent needed to fulfill all the positions needed and have been unable to provide adequate follow up to these public health problems. If just one nurse calls in sick or goes on vacation, it means that we close our doors to all family planning and immunization services so that the

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communicable disease investigation work can carry on. Our communities deserve more than the bare minimum coverage for these services that make a significant difference in their health.

In the 2015-2016 budget for the Public Health Department the County General fund support for communicable disease investigation and other Public Health programs is a quarter of what it used to be ten years ago. General Fund support in 2004-2005 was roughly \$700,000 and in 2014-2015 is \$165,000 and 2015-2016 is anticipated to be the same. We are required to be self-sustaining in an environment where services are provided on a sliding fee scale per State mandate. The Public Health budget has been reduced over 34% in the last ten years, from 2004-05 to 2014-15. If it were not for the recently announced extension of SRS funding, Public Health was looking at a potential reduction of an additional 14%, effectively reducing our budget almost one half in the last ten years. These reductions are not sustainable, and the most vulnerable of our citizens are the ones who are paying the price.

We currently rely on the State support for Public Health funding to fund the part-time nurses who conduct communicable disease investigations, administer Title 10 family planning and provide immunizations to prevent disease. Additional funding would allow our Health Department to provide all of the services required in our contract with the State each and every day that we are open to the public. It would allow us to engage with local providers to increase immunization rates as well as increase access to family planning services.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I would like to leave you with two important points. First, the funding that the Legislature allocates to State support for Public Health provides critical funding so we at a county level can provide Communicable Disease nurses in our community. Secondly, increasing this funding would allow us to better protect and serve a community where 31% of children under the age of 18 are being raised in poverty (2015 County Health Rankings) and 62% of all pregnant women are served by WIC food vouchers (2013 WIC fact sheet). Josephine County ranked 33rd of 34 ranked counties for Social and Economic Factors that affect health in the 2015 County Health Rankings. In a community like ours, State support for Public Health isn't just important.....it's priceless.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. I would be happy to answer any questions.

