Health Department

Multnomah County

February 15, 2019

Joint Committee on Carbon Reduction
900 Court St. NE - HR F
Salem, Oregon 97301

Re: HB 2020 - Relating to greenhouse gas emissions

Co-Chairs Debrow, Power, Co-Vice Chairs Bentz, Smith, and members of the Committee, my name is Sarah Lochner and I am the Deputy Director of Government Relations for Multnomah County. Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony in support of HB 2020.

Climate change threatens our health. The World Health Organization has called climate change the greatest threat to global health in the 21st century. This is a recognition of the many ways that climate change can impact health, a reality we experience in Oregon through increasing exposure to wildfire smoke, extreme heat, and harmful algal blooms in our drinking water. We see these impacts affecting vulnerable populations first and worst: older adults who are more vulnerable to extreme heat, kids who are more vulnerable to contamination in our air and water, and low income communities who lack the resources to quickly adapt. Climate change is a threat multiplier for our communities of color who already cope with a legacy of historic injustice and a disproportionate burden of chronic illness. This past September, these concerns led the Multnomah County Health Department to join a call for action on climate and health along with major public health organizations including the American Public Health Association, American Lung Association, American Academy of Pediatrics, and Kaiser Permanente.[1]

Climate action could result in large public health benefits. Investments that reduce greenhouse gas emissions also produce public health benefits. Examples include home weatherization; reducing pollution from factories, cars, and trucks; and safe infrastructure for active transportation. The potential benefits are large and could mitigate existing health disparities. Air pollution from transportation affects people of

[1] Global Climate and Health Forum. (2018). A Call To Action on Climate and Health. Available from: https://www.globalclimateandhealthforum.org/call-to-action/

color disproportionately; a 2017 study found that non-white Oregonians are exposed to higher concentrations of NO_2 than their white counterparts.[2] The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that a 10% reduction in particulate concentrations would result in 16 to 35 deaths avoided each year in Multnomah County.[3] Together, improvements in air quality and opportunities for physical activity can prevent leading causes of death in Oregon, including heart disease, diabetes, cancer, stroke, dementia, and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease.

Our communities are ready to invest in health and climate resilience. The opportunities to improve health while reducing greenhouse gases are numerous. Our community partners have demonstrated both the need and the effectiveness of investments that accomplish both goals. For example, the City of Portland has identified $253 million in needed safe routes to school improvements in the right of way, and Gresham has identified a prioritized list of $20 million in active transportation investments. Our schools are in need of retrofits to protect students from heat and wildfire smoke; Multnomah County Environmental Health estimates that two thirds of school buildings in the county do not have air conditioning, and many lack air filtration. Community organizations such as environmental justice and social enterprise nonprofits have demonstrated success in reaching low-income populations with needed weatherization services. The need is clear, and foundational work is underway to maximize public health gains from our investments in climate resilience.

On behalf of Multnomah County Health Department and the residents whose health we strive to protect, I urge your support of HB2020.

Thank you,

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[2] Clark, L. P., Millet, D. B., & Marshall, J. D. (2017). Changes in Transportation-Related Air Pollution Exposures by Race-Ethnicity and Socioeconomic Status: Outdoor Nitrogen Dioxide in the United States in 2000 and 2010. *Environmental health perspectives*, *125*(9), 097012. doi:10.1289/EHP959

[3] Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. National Environmental Public Health Tracking Network. (n.d.) Web. Accessed: 02/12/2019. www.cdc.gov/ephtracking.