



BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

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March 22, 2019

Co-Chairs Senator Beyer and Representative Nosse, and members of the Joint Committee on Ways and Means Subcommittee on Human Services:

Benton County supports investment in a Modernized Oregon Public Health System included in the Oregon Health Authority program budget of SB 5525.

Robust funding for modernizing Oregon’s public health system will help ensure that local public health authorities have the capacity to address the rising number of reportable diseases and environmental health threats, and address the leading causes of death and disease for all Oregonians.

A Modernized Public Health system will help ensure that everyone in Oregon has access to critical services for protecting their health and the health of future generations. Those protections include clean air, safe food and water, prevention of disease and the ability to respond to new and emerging health threats.

The modest Modernization funding approved in the 2017 legislative session has paid dividends in Benton County already. Our Health Department worked with several local primary care clinics to raise vaccination rates for 2-year-olds by over 5%. Staff used 2017 Modernization funding to implement a local campaign to prevent the spread of hepatitis-A outbreaks seen nationwide.

Recently San Diego County, California suffered a hepatitis-A outbreak that caused just under 600 illnesses, almost 300 hospitalizations and 20 deaths. The medical and public health costs of that outbreak was over \$12 million - and they are still having to vaccinate to prevent a recurrence. Michigan’s outbreak has sickened over 900 people, hospitalized over 700, and killed almost 30.

Our staff vaccinated over 114 against hepatitis-A. They also developed and distributed hepatitis prevention information to local social service agencies, homeless shelters, soup kitchens, faith communities, and other organizations that provide services for the homeless.

The Public Health Modernization Manual provides a structured, evidence-based roadmap for providing full and equitable services to all Oregonians, but it requires substantial, sustained funding. Investment of an additional \$47.7 million in Public Health Modernization will provide the public health system with funding to expand the current work to expand communicable disease prevention and to improve emergency and disaster preparedness.

Additional funding also will enable the system to address severely under-resourced health problems including summer wildfire smoke, drinking water contamination, flood and drought preparedness, air quality and health data analysis.

One recent example of how thinly stretched the current public health workforce is the meningococcal disease outbreak at Oregon State University between November 2016 and December 2018. Even with considerable commitment and investment from County general funds, OSU Student Health Services, and the Oregon Health Authority, this two-year effort severely taxed the resources of our small public health department. The current level of state investment in Public Health put our department into the no-win position of having to re-assign staff from many different programs to deal with this life-threatening outbreak even though no regular program mandates or requirements were suspended or deferred.

Similar trade-offs occur on a regular basis. All-too-often this impacts critical preventive health work such as food and water inspections, diabetes and tobacco prevention, post-natal nurse home visiting, and immunization or STD clinics.

In addition to Modernization, Benton County has a significant need for better services for mothers and families with newborns. Universal Nurse Home Visiting ensures safe and healthy environments for newborns. This is an evidence-based method for supporting strong, healthy families and lifelong physical and mental well-being. Investing \$4 million from the General Fund into Universal Home Visiting would initiate a system to support all families and connect them into their community system of care, giving Oregon families the support they need so all children can thrive.

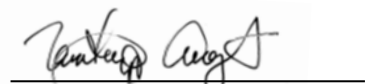
The OHA program funding in SB 5525 will move Oregon forward toward full implementation of a Modernized Public Health System.

Thank you for this opportunity to share how important Public health Modernization is to Benton County.

Sincerely,


Annabelle Jaramillo


Pat Malone


Xanthippe Augerot