



February 9, 2021

Co-Chairs Senator Lieber and Representative Nosse and members of the Committee:

Good afternoon, my name is Tricia Mortell, I am the Washington County Public Health Manager. Thank you for the opportunity to provide commentary today in support of two items in the Oregon Health Authority Public Health Division budget request: Public Health Modernization and Universally Offered Home Visiting. Both items are priorities in the 2021 legislative agenda adopted by our Board of Commissioners.

Public Health Modernization

As you have heard, so far, the Oregon Legislature has invested \$15 million in public health modernization. But this falls notably short of the \$210 million gap originally identified and shared with the legislature in 2016. The COVID-19 pandemic put into real perspective the limited resources of our governmental public health system and the need for additional funding for community-based agencies to contribute to a fully functioning public health system. Washington County supports the request of a \$69 million investment embodied in POP 417 in the agency request budget for this biennium.

During COVID, public health modernization funding, along with federal funding, was used to convene BIPOC partners to discuss and inform our data sharing efforts, increase our capacity to respond to and prevent communicable diseases including COVID, hire dedicated staff for public health communication efforts and community engagement and focus our attention on equity centered strategies for disease mitigation and now for vaccine distribution.

Additional modernization funding will further close the gaps identified in the 2016 financial assessment of the governmental public health system as well as fund continued collaboration with community-based, culturally specific partners. We need to continue these strong and effective partnerships to continue our work responding and recovering from COVID-19 and activities focused on clean air, safe food and water, and all communicable diseases. Prevention has taken a back seat during this past year and we must again uplift that work while at the same time being prepared to deal with any new health threats our community could face.

Universally Offered Home Visiting- Family Connects Oregon

I'd also like to take a moment to encourage you to fund POP 418, to implement and scale up the next phase of universally offered home visiting for new families in Oregon. Washington County is proud to have been an early adopter, but we will need sufficient funding to continue our work over the next biennium. Washington County is committed to ensuring nurses can visit each family who wishes to participate in the program. Supporting a healthy and nurturing environment for families and newborns results in many positive life-long outcomes. The Family Connects model estimates that for every dollar invested in the program there is a \$3.02 savings, primarily from reduced infant emergency medical care. Without adequate funding, Oregon will not be able to realize this important universal family support.

I thank you for your time and your support for public health modernization and universally offered home visiting.

Sincerely,

Tricia Mortell, RD, MPH
Washington County Public Health Manager