

Health Department Office of Sustainability



March 31, 2023

Joint Subcommittee On Natural Resources
Oregon State Capitol
900 Court St. NE
Salem Oregon 97301

Re: HB 5018 - Support

Dear Co-Chairs Dembrow and Pham and Members of the Committee,

The Multnomah County Office of Sustainability and the Multnomah County Health Department write in strong support of HB 5018. This bill will ensure the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) has the biennial funds it needs to administer essential programs that ensure the state is able to meet our shared public health and environmental goals including, reducing climate pollution, protecting and improving air and water quality, and ensuring timely processing of permits and other compliance activities that industry depends on.

Many of the programs that DEQ implements are properly understood as protecting public health. For example, DEQ is a very important partner in the work that Multnomah County does to protect people from the harms caused by poor air quality. One such area where state and local cooperation can help to create progress toward healthier air is wood smoke. Wood smoke is the primary source of human caused fine particulate pollution and the primary sources of polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs) in Multnomah County.

Wood smoke is known to cause heart and lung disease, breathing problems, cancer, and a number of other negative health effects. In fact, wood smoke is linked to 7 of the 10 leading causes of death in Multnomah County and accounts for 11% of cancer risk from air toxics in Multnomah County.

Reducing fine particulate pollution by 5% would prevent 13 deaths annually in Multnomah County; reducing it by 25% would prevent 63 deaths annually. For these and other reasons, DEQ Portland Air Toxic Solutions identified wood smoke reductions as the top priority. Ensuring the DEQ is equipped with a strong budget will allow Multnomah County to partner with DEQ in protecting public health and improving the everyday lives of Oregonians.

Further, the Title V program is essential to addressing air quality concerns in Multnomah County. The Title V program is a necessity, not a luxury. It ensures that the largest emitters comply with all state and federal requirements to protect communities and provide information to the public.

The proposed fee increases are the first in over ten years and would bring Oregon's fees in line with other EPA Region 10 programs.

The DEQ's critical Air Quality program provides the information and safeguards for protecting communities from toxic air pollution. This is good for businesses as well, providing regulatory certainty and predictability. Adequate funding could enable DEQ to process these permits faster, creating a better business environment, while also keeping emitters accountable.

We cannot choose the air we breathe. Children, aging adults, and those with existing cardiovascular, respiratory or other chronic illnesses are most sensitive and vulnerable to the effects of air pollution. It is in the interest of public health to develop strategies to reduce the impact of wood smoke on communities. If we hope to prevent poor health outcomes as a result of air quality in our county, we must work more with DEQ to be successful in the endeavor.

Multnomah County strongly urges you to support HB 5018.

Sincerely,

Andrea Hamberg

Director of Environmental Health Services
Multnomah County Health Department

John Wasiutynski

Director
Multnomah County Office of Sustainability