



NEHALEM BAY HEALTH DISTRICT

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**Testimony by Marc C. Johnson
Nehalem Bay Health District – Wheeler, Oregon
Prepared for the Joint Committee on Ways and Means
Newport, Oregon
April 14, 2023**

Re: Support for construction of Nehalem Bay Health Center and Pharmacy and renovation of the region's only skilled nursing and rehabilitation facility

My name is Marc C. Johnson, and I am the president of the Nehalem Bay Health District headquartered in Wheeler, Oregon in north Tillamook County.

I appear before you to respectfully request your support for a \$1 million appropriation to advance quality and accessibility upgrades in local health and senior care.

Specifically, the Health District has requested through Tillamook County legislators Senator Weber and Representative Javadi state support to supplement local funding to construction a modern, state-of-the-art Nehalem Bay Health Center and Pharmacy in Wheeler. The new facility will be located directly off Highway 101 in Wheeler on property the Health District owns. The new facility will double the size of the existing clinic in our community, will include a modern pharmacy and have room to accommodate specialty care services – for example dental and cardiology services – not now available in the community. In order to access specialty services currently residents often travel considerable distances, a major inconvenience and time commitment and for many families, children and seniors.

The new health center will remain a Federally Qualified Health Center with a mission to provide health care services to anyone without regard to ability to pay. The health center has a mission to provide comprehensive care, including behavioral health services, but has outgrown its dated building. A new modern facility will accommodate more patients and more providers.

A second part of our project involves renovation and modernization of the District owned Nehalem Valley Care Center, Tillamook County's only skilled nursing and rehabilitation center offering nursing care 24-hours a day, 365 days a year. In fact, the Care Center is the only facility of its kind on the coast between Astoria and Newport. Two assisted living facilities closed in Tillamook County last year, making the Care Center in Wheeler more important than ever before to our community and region.

The Health District also intends to repurpose the site currently occupied by the old Wheeler hospital, a building built in the 1950s and closed in the 1980s. The building is badly deteriorated and has significant needs for environmental remediation. Once the site is prepared the District intends to work with a non-profit or other developer to develop workforce housing, particularly geared toward

health care and other essential workers in the community. As you know, such housing is in critical demand on the coast. Having good housing for at least some of the nearly 80 health care workers in our community will become a deciding factor as to whether we can preserve these local health care facilities far into the future.

The Nehalem Bay Health District is the smallest health district in Oregon with one of the lowest – if not the lowest – annual tax levies. We are asking voters in our community in the May election this year to approve a \$10.25 million general obligation bond measure to fund the lion's share of these projects. Thankfully the District received, due to the work of Senators Jeff Merkley and Ron Wyden, \$3 million in Congressionally Directed Funding, an appropriation contained in the 2022 Omnibus Spending bill that passed Congress in December last year. These dollars are earmarked directly for construction of the new health center and pharmacy.

If we are successful with the bond measure next month that funding combined with the Congressional appropriation and other federal grant funds already secure will get the District to within about a million and a half dollars of the resources needed to complete the entire project.

We believe private philanthropy and foundation support can further narrow the funding gap.

Therefore, the \$1 million request our Health District has made through Senator Weber and Representative Javadi will amount to about 6% of the total project cost. Those dollars will truly make a huge difference for the community and allow us to fully fund a generationally significant health and senior care quality and access improvements, as well as permit the District to address critical health care worker housing needs. Your support will allow us to truly enter a new era of local health and senior care.

We appreciate – I appreciate – that Oregon has many, many pressing needs and you have many requests to evaluate. I hope you will consider as you evaluate the Nehalem Bay Health District's request for state funding that the District's plan addresses three of the most pressing needs in rural Oregon:

- quality health care that is local and community-based
- quality senior care for a rapidly aging population
- and workforce housing critical to attracting and retaining health care workers.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to present this testimony and thank you for your consideration.