

**Date:** March 6, 2024

**To:** Joint Committee on Ways and Means

**From:** Melissa L Russell

**RE:** Support SB 5701, RHEC Program Expansion Request

Co-Chair Girod, Co-Chair Holvey, and members of the Capitol Construction Subcommittee,

My name is Melissa L Russell, and I am writing to ask you to support SB 5701, which is an OHA Budget request to continue to support the Regional Health Equity Coalition (RHEC) budget allocation.

RHECs are autonomous, community-led coalitions that come together to identify what the most pressing health equity issues are for their communities and create policy and system changes needed to address health inequities. Currently, Oregon has 9 RHECs across the state that serve 19 counties and the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs.

RHECs have responded to communities' calls by advocating for legislative bills including investments in Oregon's Medicaid Waiver, Declaring Racism as a Public Health Crisis, Reproductive Health Equity Act, and Medicaid Waiver Renewal advocacy at the policy level. They have also responded to emergencies during COVID-19, wildfires, and wildfire recovery.

RHECs are crucial as a bridge between the healthcare system and communities. They cannot continue to do their work without being properly funded. As someone who lives in Jackson County and works in Douglas County, I have been able to participate in two RHECs. The work happening in both spaces is paramount to supporting the OHA goal of eliminating health disparities by 2030 and I am proud to be involved in this work.

The Capital Construction Subcommittee can support health equity work by funding SB 5701. We ask that you support it so RHECs can continue to address health inequities which can improve health and quality of life for Oregonians across the state.

Sincerely,

Melissa L Russell