



January 28, 2025

TO: Chair Patterson, members of the Senate Committee on Health Care

FROM: Association of Oregon Counties Legislative Affairs Manager, Jessica Pratt

RE: Support SB 161

Dear Chair Patterson and members of the committee,

On behalf of the Association of Oregon Counties, representing Oregon's county governments, I am writing to urge your support for Senate Bill 161 to train qualified local public health professionals who are currently missing across the state.

County boards of commissioners are the Local Public Health Authority, with the duty to administer and enforce Oregon's public health laws, adopt a local public health plan, provide oversight and accountability of services, and appoint a qualified local public health administrator.

Counties partner with the Oregon Public Health Division to provide services that help our communities thrive: communicable disease prevention and response; health promotion like maternal and child home health visits and substance use prevention; and environmental health services like monitoring water quality, food safety, and disaster preparedness.

These services improve the quality of life in our communities and the wellbeing of the constituents we serve and they are in peril.

Over the last decade, 75% of our public health employees have turned over and our local public health programs are experiencing chronic vacancies in mission critical positions. If we do nothing, there will simply not be qualified public health staff to do the work that we all rely on but seldom think about.



We need an immediate investment to recruit and train new local public health professionals, especially ones who are committed to living in our rural communities and who have the language and cultural competencies to match our current and future population.

Senate Bill 161 will equip local programs to train and hire a diverse workforce, recruit employees from local communities, provide scholarships and pay for training-related expenses and student loan repayment for staff retention.

AOC asks for your support for SB 161 and we thank you for taking the time today to consider this urgent statewide need.

Jessica Pratt
Legislative Affairs Manager
Association of Oregon Counties