



Doulas Latinas International

Alliance for Childbearing & Collective Health Equity, ACHE'

Dear Co-Chairs and Members of the Joint Human Services Ways & Means Committee:

I am Sandra H. Hernandez, Ph.D., executive director of Doulas Latinas International and the Alliance for Childbearing & Collective Health Equity (ACHE') to reduce maternal and child mortality and morbidity in Oregon.

Doulas Latinas International is a non-profit community-based organization funded in 2006 and led by Latino members of diverse communities that represents populations and residents of Oregon from over 18 countries. During the COVID-19 pandemic we created the Alliance for Childbearing and Collective Health Equity to work for Maternal Child Health Equity of Latino, Indigenous and Black partners with the goal to dismantle institutional oppression that might keep vulnerable pregnant mothers, babies and families without essential services of a doula, who is a certified professional public health agent. We train culturally and linguistically specific doulas who are prepared to understand the emotional and physical needs of a laboring person, enhance birth outcomes, and prevent more trauma and postpartum depression. Beyond that, with the Public Health Modernization and equity funds we have been able access we could develop a new system to enhance food sustainability and resilience to environmental change and climate health resources, by implementing community vegetable gardens in rural Oregon with community members, who work all year around to bring food to our own tables and nationwide.

Moreover, with such funds Doulas Latinas International have been a partner of the Oregon Health Authority (OHA) LUBGWMA project, known as Healthy Waters, since 2023. The Lower Umatilla Basin Ground Water Management Area wells at residencies have been analyzed and found to be most dangerous water and unhealthy for human beings. Some of these wells lab results shown found to be over 40mg or 50mg of nitrate (by EPA it should not be over 10mg). Thus, with much determination together and with the support of Environmental Agencies we have been learning and educating our communities how they can protect themselves and their families by not using the water they have at home.

Oregon's public health system includes federal, state, counties and local agencies, private organizations, community-based organizations, and other partners. Our organization represents one of the 195 community-based organizations that receives Public Health Modernization funding through the Oregon Health Authority.

As integral partners in the public health systems, community-based organizations work to minimize health risks and improve health outcomes. Community-based organizations strengthen the state's capacity to respond to emerging issues that threaten the health of Oregonians. CBOs are trusted within their local communities and are uniquely positioned to reach rural community members, people with disabilities, tribal members and other culturally specific groups who are at greater risk of health disparities.

Next, I will share some of the accomplishments and positive results of our Public Health Modernization work and the impact this work is having on the community. During these past two years, 2023-2025, we have engaged over 20,000 people of those counties and brought over 100 pregnant and breastfeeding Latino-Indigenous mothers, at our series of educational "Charlas" in Spanish and Mam, Quiche' and K'anjobal. In addition, we brought them and everyone else of these communities (including English speakers) to work with us and in collaboration with Local Health Departments and environmental agencies to improve the education and for community-health departments collaborative actions. In addition, but truly sad events are that we have heard countless stories of health issues from people who do not have access to better treatments. Among them a mother who faced multiple miscarriages, most likely due to a lack of knowledge and public health action. The true reality is that these populations have been living on for over 30 years with nitrate polluted waters in ignorance.

OHA's Current Public Health Modernization Budget is \$110M General Fund and represents essential funding for Local Public Health Authorities, Tribal, OHA and community-based organizations like ours who are working in partnership with the State. Since the pandemic, the public health system has been building up the capacity to address public health needs throughout the state, but there is a great deal more work to be done as threats to our health and well-being persist.

We are requesting an additional investment of \$25M in public health modernization budget. The additional \$2M proposed in the Governor's recommended budget does not provide the level of funding that is truly needed to address the unmet public health needs that exist in our state.

Another current successful action is that Doulas Latinas International created the UTOPIA project, United for Tobacco and Addiction Prevention Parents and Youth Alliance, to bring

parents and youth to collaborate and share what they do not know and ways to face the menthol crisis that our youth are engaged by the big industry. As public health agents, we Doulas Latinas and partners, believe that there must be ways we can prevent this crisis bad outcomes over our public health.

Thank you for your consideration of this important investment in Oregon's public health capacity, and for the opportunity to share the work we are doing in communities across the state. Together we can aim and perhaps achieve the greatest OHA goal to eliminate health disparities by 2030!

Dr. Sandra H. Hernandez, Ph.D., M.Ed, Doula, CDC Lifestyle Coach

Executive & Programs Director of Doulas Latinas International



Member of CHEC - Community Health Equity Coalition

The Community Health Equity Coalition represents dozens of Community-Based Organizations who are an integral part of Oregon's Public Health System.