



Written Testimony – Public Hearing HB 5025

February 19, 2025

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

My name is Mercy Koffa- Henderson, of Mercy Connections. Inc. An African non-profit organization.

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.

Our Public Health Modernization work focused on a culturally specific approach to outreach and education on the impact of Climate Change in underserved black communities. As a result of our outreach work, we were able to identify the needs of the community, which included cooling systems for elderly community members identified at high risk for heat strokes, depression, mental health and other heat related conditions. To meet this need and to provide these services, we partnered with OHA HRSN Climate Services and were able to provide up to 100 portable AC units to the impacted community members.

The impact reduces heat related death and saves lives by making the units available to at risk individuals, especially to parents with children diagnosed with heat illness, while connecting others to cooling stations and other essential resources.

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 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.

Our organization, among other CBOs, have built trusted and lasting relationships with our most vulnerable populations and has proven to represent our state historically underserved and underrepresented populations in ways never seen in our respective service areas until we began

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receiving fundings from OHA. We would love to continue our work and that is why we are **requesting an additional investment of \$25M into 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. There are current and emerging public health conditions, including the including the impact of substance abuse and the surge in fentanyl and counterfeit pills that is disproportionately affecting young African immigrant men. We are also concerned about the impact of tobacco use and climate change on the black community. Our organization is well positioned to provide increased awareness through culturally sensitive outreach and education.

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.

Mercy Koffa- Henderson,
Mercy Connections.

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.

“Knowledge is like a garden: If it is not cultivated, it cannot be harvested.”
~African Proverb~