

Submitter: Paul Smith  
On Behalf Of:  
Committee: Senate Committee On Health Care  
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB528

SB 528

Chair Patterson, Vice-Chair Hayden, and Members of the Committee:

I am writing to express my strong support for SB 528. My name is Paul Smith, and I am the Executive Director of Strengthening Rural Families, a community-based organization working in the Linn-Benton-Lincoln region. We work in the area of upstream prevention with tried-and-true approaches such as early childhood and parenting education, oral health, financial literacy and self-regulation skills-building programs. SB 528 is vital in providing crucial resources to Regional Health Equity Coalitions (RHECs) to continue their critical work in addressing health inequities in rural and underserved communities across Oregon. By utilizing grassroots community engagement, RHECs can identify the most pressing issues and advocate for meaningful change in policies and systems.

The expansion of RHECs, as proposed by this bill, will ensure that communities across the state, especially those in rural areas, have access to the support and resources they need to thrive.

I support this bill because grassroots and community input and involvement are a necessity for the improvement of public health outcomes and access for vulnerable populations. Good policy revision or construction requires tangible information from those closest to the issues, causes, and impacts relating to the social determinants of health. These community members know what is working and what is not in ways that the larger systems tend to either miss or misunderstand. In my experience the work of our RHEC has been key in building capacity, making connections, gathering truly representative data, and supporting community-based efforts. We know that when those further from opportunity are resourced that the whole community tends to improve, while also providing a meaningful return on the initial investment that funds the work.

This bill will significantly increase the capacity of RHECs to support our communities. I strongly urge you to vote in favor of SB 528.

Thank you,

Paul Smith  
Executive Director  
Strengthening Rural Families