



February 26, 2025

Re: Support for SB 528

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

My name is Annie Valtierra-Sanchez, and I am the Director of the Regional Health Equity Coalition of Southern Oregon, serving Jackson and Josephine Counties. I urge your strong support for Senate Bill 528.

### **Investing in Health Equity Saves Lives and Money**

Regional Health Equity Coalitions (RHECs) serve as essential connectors between communities and health systems, ensuring that health equity is not just a concept but a lived reality for all Oregonians. By funding and expanding these coalitions, SB 528 represents smart, cost-effective investments that will generate significant returns for Oregon's public health and economic well-being.

### **Why This Investment Matters:**

1. **Cost Savings Through Prevention** – Addressing health disparities early reduces expensive emergency interventions. Every dollar spent on proactive health equity initiatives saves multiple dollars in reduced hospital visits and long-term care costs.
2. **Stronger Workforce, Stronger Economy** – Healthier communities mean a more stable and productive workforce, leading to economic growth and reduced strain on public assistance programs.
3. **Rapid, Targeted Crisis Response** – During the COVID-19 pandemic and wildfires, RHECs provided essential outreach, filling critical gaps in public health response. Expanding RHEC capacity ensures future crises can be met with swift, community-centered solutions.

### **Key Provisions of SB 528 & SB 530:**

- Increase funding to sustain and grow existing RHECs.
- Establish three new coalitions to serve currently unrepresented rural counties with high unmet health needs, according to the Oregon Office for Rural Health.

- Support staffing, operational costs, and stipends for community leaders, ensuring diverse and equitable participation in decision-making.

### **SO Health-E's Impact**

- COVID-19 Response: Ensured life-saving resources, testing, and vaccine access for marginalized communities in Southern Oregon by hosting vaccine clinics, convened the Jackson County Vaccine Equity Collaborative with hospital systems, public health, FQHCs, CCOs and CBOs to ensure alignment and information sharing during this critical time, hosted the only Spanish language resource website on Covid-19 and vaccine access in Southern Oregon.
- Wildfire Recovery: Provided housing support and recovery services to families displaced by the Almeda and Obenchain fires. SO Health-E for example paid down payments for new homes or deposits and first month's rent for new rentals to rehouse 65 very low income families.
- Economic Resilience: Connected low-income families, immigrants, and farmworkers with essential health and social services such as assisting with OHCS housing assistance applications and Oregon Farmworker Relief Fund applications, reducing disparities and strengthening community stability.

### **Oregon Can't Afford to Wait**

The demand for RHEC services has skyrocketed while funding has remained stagnant. These bills are not just about fairness; they are about fiscal responsibility. A well-funded health equity infrastructure prevents crises before they escalate into costly emergencies.

**Importantly, this investment is included in the Governor's recommended budget and aligns with the Oregon Health Authority's agency funding request, reinforcing its necessity and fiscal responsibility.**

I urge you to support SB 528 to ensure a healthier, more resilient Oregon for all. Thank you for your time and leadership.

Annie Valtierra-Sanchez,



Director at SO Health-E, the Regional Health Equity Coalition of Southern Oregon