



February 27th, 2025

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

I'm writing in support of SB 528. My name is Jayden Ruff, and I am the Director of the South Coast Health Equity Coalition, serving Coos and Curry Counties. SB 528 will provide essential resources to Regional Health Equity Coalitions (RHECs), allowing us to continue addressing health disparities by centering the priorities of communities in rural regions of Oregon. Through grassroots community engagement, we work alongside residents to create lasting solutions informed by their lived experiences, leading to meaningful policy and systems change.

Our coalition is built on a deep commitment to prioritizing the communities we serve. Our team and leadership council reflect the populations we work alongside, bringing unique perspectives on navigating rural systems. This connection allows us to foster trust and build relationships—foundational steps in addressing disparities that impact rural communities, including:

- Generational poverty
- Substance use disorder
- Rural isolation
- Equitable and affirming healthcare access
- Access to healthy food
- Connection to culturally specific spaces and events

A clear example of this work is our engagement with Spanish-speaking community members in Curry County. We hosted a listening session to hear directly about their experiences accessing healthcare and building a sense of belonging. When programs are underutilized, the assumption is often that they are unnecessary. What we uncovered was a strong desire for engagement—people want to participate, but they need genuine opportunities to be heard.

What started as a small listening session quickly became a town hall with over 75 community members eager to share their perspectives and collaborate on solutions. After capturing their insights in an impact report, we reconvened to ensure their stories were accurately represented. This report then became a tool for change, guiding the development of:

- English as a Second Language (ESL) Classes
- Nutrition programs with a focus on diabetes prevention
- Mental health support focusing on emotional regulation and reducing stigma
- Community-centered exercise programs
- Volunteer initiatives supporting local organizations serving unhoused individuals—including a partnership that has provided nearly 600 tamales and counting to community members.

The Regional Health Equity Coalition model is deeply responsive to community needs, especially in rural areas where residents often feel disconnected from public health initiatives. By actively collaborating with coordinated care organizations, public health departments, community-based organizations,

government agencies, and healthcare providers, we work to create sustainable solutions rooted in lived experiences. Our impact includes:

- **Housing Equity:** Partnered with the Coos and Curry Housing Authority to conduct community listening sessions, generating an impact report that helped secure funding for the Banger School Housing Project, which will bring 174 new housing units to Coos County.
- **Community Engagement:** Trained 234 participants at our Annual South Coast Diversity Conference, fostering discussions around systemic inequities, disability justice, and cultural humility.
- **Improving Healthcare Experiences:** Established ongoing professional development partnerships with Waterfall Community Health Center, Oregon Coast Community Action, and Coos-Curry Housing Authority—supporting staff, patients, and community engagement through policy and practice analysis.
- **Advocating for Better Care:** Collaborating with Advanced Health and AllCare to address community concerns and improve healthcare delivery.
- **Reproductive Justice:** Launched the South Coast Reproductive Justice Project, addressing healthcare deserts in Curry County by expanding access to menstrual products, reproductive health resources, gender-affirming care, and sexual assault advocacy. This initiative has also strengthened partnerships with healthcare providers, defense attorneys, and domestic violence shelters.
- **Childcare Expansion:** Partnered with NeighborWorks Umpqua to launch a childcare accelerator program, resulting in 22 Spanish-speaking graduates starting their own childcare businesses on the South Coast.

None of this progress would be possible without the existence of Regional Health Equity Coalitions and our commitment to uplifting community voices. SB 528 is not just about funding—it is about building capacity for real change. By investing in community-driven solutions, we can continue this vital work across Coos and Curry Counties and beyond.

I urge you to vote YES on SB 528 and support regional health equity efforts that directly impact rural communities across Oregon.

For more information or to get involved, please contact:

**Jayden Ruff** at [jayden@southcoastequity.org](mailto:jayden@southcoastequity.org).

Sincerely,



Jayden Ruff (she/her)

Director, South Coast Equity Coalition