

Submitter: Juliet Rutter
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Senate Committee On Health Care
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB528

Testimony in Support of SB 528
2/28/2025

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

My name is Juliet Rutter, and I am the RHEC Coordinator at RISE of the Umpqua and Willamette Valleys. I urge your strong support for SB 528 because investing in health equity and increasing the amount of counties being served by Regional Health Equity Coalitions (RHECs) strengthens Oregon's communities and ensures that every resident—regardless of race, income, geography, etc.—has access to the care and resources they need to thrive. SB 528 will provide critical resources to RHECs so they can continue reducing health inequities by identifying the most important issues that impact people in underserved, rural regions of Oregon. By assessing these barriers through grassroots community engagement, they are able to uplift the voices of their communities to create effective solutions through policy and systems change. The expansion of RHECs will ensure that populations whose voices are not being heard all over the state are getting their needs met.

RHECs are making a tangible difference in people's lives. For example, in Douglas and Lane counties, health care related organizations and agencies are using the 2024 Health Equity Needs Assessment data we collected from populations such as the Latine community, the disabled community, the LGBTQIA2S+ community, rural youth, and people without shelter to improve their programs and apply for grants. This has been especially helpful in Douglas County where there are fewer organizations and supports for marginalized people.

A small sample of some of the statewide RHEC accomplishments over the past 10 years include:

- Eastern Oregon Health Equity Alliance ensured rural representation on Oregon's Healthcare Interpreter Council.
- Mid-Columbia Health Equity Advocates helped remove barriers to obtaining state identification cards, improving access to essential services.
- Linn Benton Lincoln Health Equity Alliance advocated for language access services for Spanish speakers in a local public health nutrition program.
- SO Health-E collaborated with public health during the 2023 Jackson and Josephine Community Health Assessment (CHA) and Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP). By engaging with community members who are typically underrepresented in these projects, they increased CHA participation by 49% from

2018.

- During the wildfires, SO Health-E worked with partners to raise and distribute over \$1.25 million in fire relief, they directly supported 66 families who lost their homes to get back into stable housing, and they provided food, water, PPE, and mental health support to Latine and Native American communities impacted by the wildfires.

If SB 528 passes, new regional health equity coalitions will have the opportunity to do the same in areas that urgently need this kind of support.

Due to our coalition being run by local people and not being led by organizations and agencies who have caused and perpetuated harm, people who are normally hard to reach through official channels are not as hard for us to engage with. We are able to hear the real stories of people dealing with discrimination and barriers that are not being talked about anywhere else, especially in rural areas. Addressing the issues these groups are raising will not only make services better for them, but will make services better for everyone in the community.

RHECs have been at the forefront of creating real, community-led change. We work directly with communities that face the greatest barriers to health, advocating for policies and programs that address root causes of disparities. By funding and expanding these coalitions, SB 528 ensures that this essential work can continue and grow. I urge you to support SB 528 to build a healthier, more equitable Oregon. Thank you for your time and leadership.

Sincerely,

Juliet Rutter, MS, GC

RISE of the Umpqua and Willamette Valleys