



March 7th, 2025

Dear Senator Patterson,

On behalf of the South Coast Health Equity Coalition (SCHEC), we strongly support Senate Bill (SB) 529, which prioritizes direct contracting, improved reimbursement, and reduced administrative barriers for Traditional Health Workers (THWs), community health registered nurses, and community-based organizations.

For too long, THWs have played an essential yet underfunded role in Oregon's healthcare system. They are on the front lines of addressing social determinants of health, providing culturally responsive care, connecting individuals to essential resources, and ensuring that historically underserved communities—including Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC), 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals, and rural populations—receive the preventative care and social services they deserve. However, current regulations and reimbursement models fail to support and sustain these critical services, threatening workforce retention and the ability to expand community-based healthcare access.

Why SB 529 Matters: Addressing Systemic Barriers to Health Equity

- **Traditional Health Workers are Essential to Community Health**
THWs fill critical gaps in healthcare by providing preventative services, chronic disease management, and culturally relevant care—all of which reduce the burden on emergency and acute care systems. However, restrictive policies make it difficult for THWs to receive fair compensation and recognition for their contributions.
- **Bureaucratic Barriers & Unnecessary Supervision Requirements**
Current clinical supervision mandates create unnecessary obstacles, despite THWs being trained professionals. These requirements delay care delivery and limit THWs' ability to work independently, despite their expertise and deep community connections. SB 529 would simplify supervision requirements, allowing THWs to provide care efficiently without unnecessary bureaucratic oversight.
- **Reimbursement Gaps & Financial Struggles**
Many THW services are not adequately reimbursed under the current 1115 Medicaid Waiver, forcing community-based organizations to operate without sustainable funding. SB 529 proposes expanding billing codes, increasing reimbursement rates, and reducing administrative costs, ensuring that THWs can continue their vital work without financial strain.
- **Removing Diagnosis Barriers for Reimbursement**
Current Medicaid policies tie reimbursement to medical diagnoses and treatment plans, which deters many vulnerable individuals from seeking THW services. Many of the people we serve need preventative, wraparound, and culturally specific care before reaching a crisis point—yet the existing system denies them access until their conditions worsen. SB 529 would remove this diagnosis requirement, allowing THWs to provide proactive and preventative care.
- **Ensuring Sustainable Contracting for THWs & Community-Based Organizations**
Without direct and simplified contracting mechanisms, community-based THW organizations struggle to secure the long-term funding necessary to maintain staff, expand services, and meet growing healthcare needs. SB 529 mandates direct contracting between the Oregon Health

Authority (OHA), Coordinated Care Organizations (CCOs), and THWs/THW provider organizations, streamlining service delivery and funding access.

The South Coast Health Equity Coalition urges the Oregon Legislature to pass SB 529 to ensure that Traditional Health Workers receive the resources, compensation, and structural support they need to continue serving our communities. This bill represents a crucial step toward health equity, workforce sustainability, and systemic change in how Oregon values and integrates community-based care.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jayden Ruff". The script is cursive and fluid, with the first name "Jayden" and last name "Ruff" clearly legible.

Jayden Ruff (she/her)

Director, South Coast Equity Coalition