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Advisory Committee

March 27, 2025

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CARE Inc.

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Adventist Health Tillamook

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Mari Tasche
Oregon Health & Science Univ.

Dear Co-Chairs Lieber and Sanchez and members of the Joint Committee on Ways and Means,

On behalf of Tillamook County Wellness, a population health improvement initiative and program of Tillamook County Public Health, I am writing to express strong support for state investment in the development of the Salmonberry Trail. This project provides a significant return on investment to the region and the state, through increased safety, livability, health outcomes and economic prosperity. All of these are desperately needed in the rural communities of the north Oregon coast.

In my role as well-being director at Adventist Health Tillamook, and coordinator for Tillamook County Wellness, I lead Tillamook County's Community Health Needs Assessments. This triennial data-driven process identifies upstream drivers of health inequities and outcomes in our communities. Our 2025 data show that residents in Tillamook County experience more poor physical health days than other parts of the state and nation. Tillamook County also has a significantly high rate of early mortality and poor mental health, including high rates of deaths of despair.

Despite the natural beauty and recreational amenities available in the region, Tillamook County has a rate of 63% access to exercise opportunities, compared to the state average of 88%. Approximately one-third of all adults in Tillamook County are obese. Preventable chronic health conditions like heart disease, diabetes, and cancer are the top drivers of community health. Tillamook County data also show double the state rate of motor vehicle crash deaths, some involving bicycles on the roadway, including along Highway 101. This statistic is likely exacerbated by the region's narrow, curvy roads lacking shoulders and bike lanes.

Safety, cost and convenience drive choice. Lack of accessible, off-road community paths results in fewer people walking and biking, thereby contributing to higher risk for chronic illness. Development of the Salmonberry Trail provides a meaningful solution to these challenges, while also addressing social determinants of health such as increased social connection and community connectivity.

Tillamook County has identified Mental Health as one of the top priorities in our 2026-2028 Community Health Improvement Plan.

**Tillamook County Wellness is a
program of Tillamook County
Public Health**

Physical movement, especially within communities and trusted groups, is an evidence-based approach for improving mental health outcomes. Our Behavioral Health Resource Network has developed robust community partnerships in support of reducing substance use, while increasing access to positive social supports needed in recovery. Being active, outdoors and connected with others on safe, accessible trails provides significant mental health benefits. The Salmonberry Trail can be an integral part of this approach.

The Oregon coast needs safe places for people to ride bicycles. The Salmonberry Trail provides public access to a much-needed resource for families and children. When we bought our modestly sized home for our family of five, our first investment was not to add on to our house, but to build a shop so our tiny tots had somewhere to play and ride their bikes. As our children grew, we drove long distances to rail-trails, like the Banks-Vernonia Trail, to introduce our children to the joys of biking. Very few families own bicycles on the coast. It is simply not a safe activity. Moving the Salmonberry Trail forward is vital for our region given the health benefits – and for children, the neurodevelopmental benefits – of physical activities such as bike riding.

Thank you for your leadership and your consideration of support for this important infrastructure investment in northwest Oregon.

Sincerely,



Michelle Jenck
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Coordinator, Tillamook County Wellness