

February 21, 2019

Joint Committee On Ways and Means
Subcommittee On Natural Resources
900 Court St. NE - H 174
Salem, Oregon 97301

Re: HB 5017 - Relating to the financial administration of the Department of Environmental Quality

Dear Co-Chairs Taylor and Reardon, and members of the Committee:

Multnomah County urges your support for passage HB 5017, which would fund the vital services provided by the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ). Clean air, water and land are the basic building blocks to a safe and prosperous community. These life sustaining resources are too often threatened through malice and neglect, however, and it is only by ensuring adequate resources for DEQ, and the dedicated environmental professionals who work there, that the legislature can assure continued improvement in the environmental conditions of our beautiful state.

In Multnomah County in particular we have seen serious environmental disasters threaten our community. From a warehouse fire in Northwest Portland that sent asbestos contaminated ash raining over downtown Portland, to a junkyard fire in the Cully Neighborhood that sent a plumb of acrid black smoke billowing through neighborhoods, it has been the quick work of DEQ staff that has supported our ability to respond. The investments that the legislature makes in DEQ will be repaid many times over not only through improved emergency response, but also through the prevention of air, water and soil contamination in the first place, and avoided morbidity and mortality due to environmental exposure to toxins.

While the entire budget is worthy of funding, I wanted to draw your attention to the following items that we believe are particularly important.

POP 116 - Eliminate Air Quality Permit Backlog. This service is vitally important to both regulated entities and the public. The state has air quality permits that have not been renewed in over 20 years, and the permit system is not available for the public to view online. This will help to fix those issues and modernize the system.

POP 118: Maintain Effective Vehicle Inspection Service. Cars and trucks are the single largest source of air pollution in the Portland Metro area. The Vehicle Inspection Program has been a key factor in reducing pollution from these sources and helping the region maintain compliance with federal air quality standards. Maintaining and strengthening this program is critical, particularly since the Portland metro area is experiencing increasing levels of ozone pollution, which is linked to increasing use of automobiles.

POP 119: Implement the Air Toxics Permitting Program. Cleaner Air Oregon is the most important environmental achievement in Oregon within recent memory. Not since the implementation of Oregon land use laws has the state taken such an important step toward preserving and enhancing the quality of life for all Oregonians. Fully funding the program is the critical last step before the this program can take full effect.

POP 134: Improve Statewide Emergency Response. DEQ receives over 2,000 incident notifications from the Oregon Emergency Response System each year and doesn't have adequate capacity to respond in full measure. When a significant spill occurs, emergency response action typically requires multiple DEQ staff for environmental analysis, planning, community liaison or logistical support. Depending on the size and complexity of the emergency, staff may be needed for days, weeks, or even months. As such, the agency quickly exhausts resources when dealing with multiple or long term events like the oil train fire in Mosier. Other emergency response agencies, such as Multnomah County, would benefit from DEQ having greater staff capacity to handle hazardous material releases and spills.

Although not included in the Governor's budget, we think these two program areas also merit funding:

Implement a Prescription Takeback Program. DEQ is proposing a legislative concept to create a statewide prescription drug take-back program. The program would have one permanent full-time position and one limited duration position, totaling \$261,908 Other Funds. The Department would partner with the Board of Pharmacy for inspection at collection kiosks during regular pharmacy inspections. Funds for the program would come from fees paid by pharmaceutical manufacturers included in the legislative concept.

Control pollution from wood burning stoves. Wood smoke is a serious health concern in many parts of the state, including Multnomah County. Wood smoke is the largest source of toxic polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons in the Portland Metro region and particulate matter from wood burning threatens to push the Portland Metro area out of compliance with federal Clean Air Act standards. Appropriating funds would serve to support and enhance fledgling efforts to educate the public and establish woodstove change-out programs that will help to eliminate this problem.

Thank you for this opportunity to lend Multnomah County's support to these budget priorities. With the Legislature's support Oregon can take important steps forward this coming biennium in protecting and improving the environment of our state.

Please let me know if Multnomah County can provide any additional information that would be useful to your deliberations.

Sincerely,

Sarah Lochner

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