



## **AOC Communications**

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### **County Commissioners Push for Public Health Funding**

Salem - Oregon's public health system could suffer irreparable harm if deep cuts are made to state budgets funding that vital public service according to two Southern Oregon county commissioners.

"We are doing the best we can with the funding we have," Coos County Commissioner Kevin Stufflebean told the Legislature's Ways and Means Human Services Subcommittee Monday night. Commissioner Stufflebean testified alongside Klamath County Commissioner John Elliott on Public Health Day at the State Capitol.

Commissioner Stufflebean told the subcommittee that Coos County established the first county health department in Oregon in 1922 and has a long tradition of providing public health services. Acknowledging the challenges Legislators face today with a huge budget shortfall, Commissioner Stufflebean said the state dollars for public health go a long way in Coos County. However, he said, Coos County is on the brink of returning some public health programs back to the state because of local budget difficulties. "This is not a decision we would undertake lightly," Commissioner Stufflebean said.

Commissioner Elliott emphasized the importance of the partnership between the state and Oregon counties in providing public health services for the citizens of Oregon. Klamath County puts \$300,000 to \$400,000 in general funds into county public health programs every year while continuing to seek out federal and state grants according to Commissioner Elliott. Keeping state funding at current levels would seem to be a "no brainer," Commissioner Elliott said, "however, these are illogical times," he added.

Commissioner Stufflebean told the subcommittee that public health prevention programs pay big dividends by keeping people healthy. He pointed out that many of those prevention programs are funded by the state and without those programs, the cost of taking care of sick people is far higher than the cost of the prevention programs.

Both commissioners shared the extent of public health services in their counties with the subcommittee, services such as immunizations for school children, flu shots for seniors, restaurant inspections, swimming pool inspections, family planning, home visiting programs, tobacco prevention, child abuse prevention and communicable disease investigation to name some. Eliminating or cutting those programs would create great hardships on Oregonians the commissioners said.

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