

Written Testimonies for the Washington County and Service District for Lighting No. 1 Budget Committee Public Hearing on 5/26/2021

1. Brian Decker

(Received on 5/24/2021)

Dear Budget Committee,

I write to urge you to listen to the community when they tell you how they want their dollars prioritized.

Last year, the county held Community Listening Sessions where 61% of those polled wanted a decrease in Public Safety and Justice spending, and 71% wanted an increase in investment in Housing Health and Human Services. The proposed budget does the opposite: it raises the Public Safety and Justice budget by \$1.6 million while cutting the Housing Health and Human Services budget by 5%, including in particular an 11% cut to the housing budget. The increase on law enforcement spending comes despite a 9% decrease to the overall budget.

Increased spending in public safety does not make our community safer. Our community would be better served, and safer, by a robust investment in social services such as housing and mental health treatment. We can't afford, for instance, a 10% increase in county funding for the Sheriff's Office Public Affairs PR budget or a 54% increase in Sheriff's Office expenditures for contracting with TriMet and the WIN Team. Please prioritize the housing and treatment services our community relies on.

Brian Decker
Minister of Registry
Washington County Justice Initiative

2. Jennifer McElravery, PharmD

Washington County Public Health Advisory Council

(Received on 5/24/2021)

May 24, 2021

Washington County's significant response to the COVID-19 pandemic this past year highlighted the importance of having an appropriately funded public health system. The work of our Public Health Division has helped to mitigate the impact of the pandemic in our community by ensuring that those most vulnerable, and those most impacted have had access testing and care, access to supports to ensure they could safely quarantine, and access to education and information in their language. They have supported businesses in understanding rapidly changing guidelines and ensuring safe operations for their employees and customers. This work has helped to save over 500 lives within our county.

The Washington County Public Health Advisory Council supports the current proposed FY 21-22 budget for the Public Health Division. Adequate funding for the Public Health Division is critical for maintaining a strong public health system and a diverse and well-trained public health workforce. The Public Health Division plays a leading role in preventing, preparing for and responding to infectious disease outbreaks like COVID-19, addressing the ongoing opioid epidemic, working to prevent vaccine-preventable disease outbreaks from occurring, supporting new parents through home visiting programs and supporting nutrition and wellness in young children.

We appreciate that Washington County HHS and the Public Health Division continue to receive general county support for annual budgets. Although the proposed budget for Public Health reflects a small increase from last year, this is mostly due to increasing personnel costs. We understand that reductions in training, professional services, materials, and supplies were made to accommodate a request for a small reduction in Department budgets.

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the need for continuing support and investment in our public health system. Ensuring our Public Health Division is appropriately funded allows for the Division to continue to administer and enforce public health laws; adopt and implement a local public health modernization plan that includes implementation of all foundational programs; and work with community partners to ensure the health and safety of our community.

In addition to our support of the current proposed FY 21-22 Public Health Division budget, the Public Health Advisory Council recommends the County consider modifying its process for future budget cycles. We are aware of other organizations that allow for policy makers to weigh in on potential budget adds based on emerging issues. We encourage the County to consider modifying the future budget process to allow leadership from HHS and the Public Health Division to provide more detailed information about how additional funds might be used to support community health and well-being, and close health equity gaps in the county.

Sincerely,

Jennifer McElravey, PharmD
Chair, Washington County Public Health Advisory Council
Washington County Health and Human Services, Public Health Division