

Testimony
HB 1012
House Appropriations-Human Resources Division
January 27, 2025

Chairperson Nelson and Members of the House Appropriations-Human Resources Division Committee:

My name is Erin Ourada, and I am the administrator at Western Plains Public Health, the local public health unit that covers Grant, Mercer, Morton, Oliver, and Sioux Counties. We employ a variety of public health professionals such as environmental health practitioners, dietitians, nurses, tobacco prevention specialists, and administrative support staff. These individuals implement the core functions of public health which are communicable disease control, chronic disease and injury prevention, environmental public health, maternal, child and family health, and access to clinical care.

I am in support of HB 1012 which includes \$8,000,000 state aid to local public health units. However, I would like to encourage consideration to increase this amount to \$10,000,000. State aid is one of our only flexible funding sources and fills gaps that other funding can't cover. In 2024 state aid only made up 13% of our annual collections. The flexibility of this funding allows us to adapt our programming to our community's needs. The needs of our communities sometimes vary greatly across the five counties we serve. One community may need more state aid devoted to newborn home visiting whereas the next community may need more state aid devoted to home visits and medication management with the elderly. Many other funding sources do not allow for this type of flexibility and thus our community's needs cannot always be uniquely met. Federal funding for instance often comes with strict eligibility criteria and restrictions, limiting our ability to respond to emergent or unique community needs.

My family was able to benefit from one of the programs implemented by WPPH with state aid funding. WPPH nurses use a special tool to screen certain elementary grades at almost every school in our jurisdiction. Recently, our daughter received a vision screen in 1st grade at her school and she failed the screening which prompted us to visit an eye doctor for an exam. This exam showed us that my daughter's right eye is not working well and so her left eye is being overworked. We had no idea as she wasn't having issues in school and was not showing any signs of having problems seeing. Thankfully, the doctor feels glasses should correct and prevent any long-term issues because we caught it in time. But it wasn't us that caught it, it was the preventative screen she had at school. The screen that we didn't have

to pay for, but which was provided by WPPH with state aid funding. Many don't see public health at work, but without it, we would all notice in one way or another.

Western Plains Public Health appreciates your support and is extremely grateful for state aid funding. We ensure that every dollar of state aid is used responsibly, tracking outcomes to demonstrate its value to the community. Thank you for your time and I can now answer any questions you may have.

Respectfully submitted,

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