

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

Prepared for OAFP

August 5, 2020

The Joint Emergency Board met Wednesday afternoon to provide funding for a number of expenditures related to the coronavirus response. Once again, the tension was palpable between committee members and democratic leadership due to the lack of transparency into the process.

Sen. Betsy Johnson (D-Scappoose), one of the Senate Co-Chairs of Ways and Means, was clearly aggravated by what she called a “paucity of information” about the process in which awards would be made. Many other democrats echoed her concerns. Republicans on the other hand decried the meeting altogether, saying these issues were better taken up in the Special Session just 5 days away, where they could have ample discussion about the allocations.

Despite the objections, most of the allocations passed. They included:

Funding for Testing and Coronavirus

\$94.2 million to expand coronavirus testing and contact tracing. The appropriation passed on a party line vote. The funding will be split between:

- \$20.7 million for testing at the state lab
- \$73.5 million to local public health authorities, tribal communities, community-based organizations, and quarantine and isolation support services

Democrats and Republicans voiced discomfort about the lack of transparency but House Republican Leader Drazan (R-Canby) was the most forceful. “While there is some economy of scale in the idea that the state can provide procurement and centralized purchasing, outside of that, to take all of the remaining [federal funding for] local government funding and direct it at the state level, I think is a matter of over-arching, over-reaching state level control, when local government control could certainly have met this need just as efficiently and just as effectively.”

The appropriation passed on a party line vote.

Social Determinants of Health

\$45 million from the Coronavirus Relief Fund to the Oregon Health Authority to address the social determinants of health contributing to the disproportionate impact the COVID-19 pandemic has had on Oregon’s tribal communities and communities of color. Some examples of investments include:

- Thermometers, personal protective items, wrap around support services, childcare support, business consulting and technology to improve telehealth and distance learning access
- Food insecurity and housing - food, bedding, transportation, home heating and cooling costs, and outdoor gear for situations of homelessness; and
- Safety and violence - emergency motel vouchers for people experiencing child abuse or domestic violence, culturally and linguistically appropriate services that

address domestic violence, and social life skills programs for parents to address stress, depression, and self-care.

Republicans objected again, saying this money would be better allocated to Coordinated Care Organizations (CCOs), which are required to have equity plans. Speaker Kotek acknowledged that one of the impacts of the pandemic is that the Oregon Health Authority has not been able to do the level of stakeholder engagement they normally would. But she also pointed out that there are many people impacted by coronavirus who are not on Medicaid.

The appropriation passed, but Sen. Betsy Johnson (D-Scappoose) joined republicans in voting no.

PPE Procurement for Local Governments

At the May 15th meeting of the Emergency Board, the decision was made to split the \$1.39 billion received for the state from the Coronavirus Relief Fund into three pots - State Expenses (\$450 million), Local Government and Tribes (\$415 million), and Reserves (\$525 million).

During that same meeting, the Emergency Board provided \$215 million of the \$415 million to reimburse the direct costs of local governments and tribes outside of the Portland area. The remaining \$200 million was set aside for the state to use its purchasing power to buy and provide PPE and other services that would directly benefit local governments. This allocation would have used \$105 million of that for the centralized purchase and distribution of personal protective equipment (PPE).

“I have significant concerns about the prescriptive nature of this allocation,” commented Sen. Elizabeth Steiner Hayward (D-Beaverton). Many legislators echoed this sentiment, saying local governments have other needs such as rent assistance, and should have local control over these dollars.

Food Bank, Rate Increases for IDD and Emergency COVID Beds

\$8 million for food assistance already provided by the Oregon Food Bank, and \$21.8 million to the Department of Human Services for Aging and People with Disabilities and Intellectual/Developmental Disabilities for a 10% service rate increases for 24-hour residential service providers and emergency COVID beds.

The allocation passed unanimously.

###