

#CACantWait

UNTIL THE NEXT CRISIS

March 2, 2022

The Honorable Susan Talamantes Eggman
Chair, Senate Budget and Fiscal Review Subcommittee No. 3
1021 O Street, Room 8530
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Request for Support – Public Health Equity and Readiness Opportunity (HERO) Initiative

Dear Senator Eggman,

The undersigned organizations, representing the California Can't Wait Coalition, strongly support addressing the longstanding erosion of the public health workforce and infrastructure and write to respectfully request that the Legislature approve the Public Health Equity and Readiness Opportunity (HERO) Initiative, which seeks to bolster California's public health recruitment and retention and the workforce pipeline.

We have seen first-hand throughout the COVID-19 pandemic the devastation that underfunding and neglect of local public health departments can have on communities across the state. Local public health departments are the first line of defense against all public health threats, and these departments rely on a highly skilled and specialized workforce are often stretched far too thin. While COVID-19 is the most devastating epidemiological event in recent memory, it is likely not the last public health threat of this magnitude and scope. However, one lesson that must not be lost is that local health departments are instrumental in protecting lives, ensuring health equity, and avoiding excess social and economic disruption. Simply put, California cannot continue to neglect this vital role.

Even before the pandemic, public health departments have faced significant workforce challenges. Fewer than one in six graduates from schools of public health go on to work in governmental public health and nationwide, public health lost roughly 50,000 jobs after the Great Recession. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated these challenges as public health workers have grappled with burnout and harassment, while also being heavily recruited by other sectors.

For these reasons, we respectfully urge the Legislature to approve the following investments, totaling \$186.4 million General Fund (available up to four years), to preserve and bolster the public health workforce:

Recruitment and Retention

- **Public Health Recruitment and Retention Stipends (\$120 million one-time over 3 years).** Provide stipends for positions that the local health department deems hard to recruit and retain. Positions may include, but are not limited to epidemiologists, public health laboratory directors, health officers, public health nurses, infectious disease specialists, food and disease surveillance, and information systems/data analysts. Stipends can be used to support loan repayment, sign on bonuses, longevity bonuses, or other recruitment and retention strategies, and would include a \$10 million set-aside for rural and Central Valley counties.
- **Waive Public Health Nurse Certification Fees for 3 years (\$10 million one-time).** Public health nurses are required to pay for an additional certification, but do not make as much as their counterparts who are also Registered Nurses working in different settings. The additional costs associated with the public health nurse certification is often a barrier to attracting nurses for public health. These funds would go directly to the Board of Registered Nursing to cover the costs previously funded through fees.

Public Health Training and Pipeline Investments

- **Incumbent Worker Upskill Training. (\$12.8 million one-time, over 4 years).** Funds would establish the Public Health Workforce Career Ladder Education and Development Program to provide education and training for existing employees within the public health workforce. The program would provide stipends to offset up to 12 hours per workweek to complete educational requirements and would make local health department employers willing to these hours, eligible for enhanced grants to hire additional employees to support the goals of the program.
- **California Public Health Pathways Training Corp (CA-PHC) (\$24 million one-time, over 3 years).** Funds would expand the current program administered by CDPH, which provides a workforce pathway for early-career public health professionals from diverse backgrounds and disproportionately affected communities to conduct communicable disease prevention and control, community engagement, and emergency response activities at local health department host sites. Funding is estimated to support 100 trainees per year for three years.
- **California Microbiologist Training (\$6.5 million one-time, over 3 years).** Funds would increase the number of Public Health Microbiologist Trainee spots in California, a requirement that must be fulfilled to become a California Certified Public Health Microbiologists. Funding is estimated to support 30 trainees per year for three years.
- **Public Health Lab Aspire (\$6.6 million one-time, over 3 years).** Restore funding for the Lab Aspire Program, which was established in 2006 to address the severe shortage of trained and qualified public health laboratory directors.
- **California Epidemiologic Investigation Service (Cal-EIS) Training (\$6.5 million one-time, over three years).** Funding would increase the number of Cal-EIS fellows, a training program to prepare epidemiologists for public health leadership positions throughout

California. Fellows are placed in CDPH offices or in local health departments throughout the state. Funding is estimated to support 100 fellows over three years.

Our nation has experienced what understaffed and under-resourced local public health departments mean for community spread and outcomes during a pandemic, and California is no exception. We have the opportunity to rebuild the public health workforce through ongoing funding for positions, recruitment and retention, and training and pipeline investments.

It is for these reasons that our organizations respectfully urge the Legislature to approve the Public Health Equity and Readiness Opportunity (HERO) Initiative's workforce recruitment, retention, training, and pipeline investments.

Respectfully,

As signed by

Michelle Gibbons
Executive Director
County Health Executives Association of
California

As signed by

Kat DeBurgh
Executive Director
Health Officers Association of California

As signed by

Matt Legé
Government Relations Advocate
SEIU California

As signed by

Farrah McDaid Ting
Legislative Representative
California State Association of Counties

As signed by

Sarah Dukett
Policy Advocate
Rural County Representatives of California

As signed by

Kelly Brooks-Lindsey
Legislative Advocate
Urban Counties of California

As signed by

Harold Goldstein, DrPH
Executive Director
Public Health Advocates

cc: Honorable Members, Senate Budget and Fiscal Review Subcommittee No. 3
Joe Stephenshaw, Staff Director, Senate Budget & Fiscal Review Committee
Scott Ogus, Consultant, Senate Committee on Budget and Fiscal Review Subcommittee No. 3
Kirk Feely, Fiscal Director, Senate Republican Caucus
Anthony Archie, Consultant, Senate Republican Caucus
Keely Bosler, Director, California Department of Finance
Dr. Mark Ghaly, Secretary, California Health and Human Services Agency
Dr. Tomás Aragón, Director and State Public Health Officer, California Dept. of Public Health
Elizabeth Landsberg, Director, Department of Health Care Access and Information
Richard Figueroa, Legislative Affairs Secretary, Office of Governor Gavin Newsom
Tam Ma, Deputy Legislative Secretary, Office of Governor Gavin Newsom