



STATE OF WASHINGTON
WASHINGTON STATE BOARD OF HEALTH

PO Box 47990 • Olympia, Washington 98504-7990

February 23, 2005

The Honorable Eileen Cody
Washington State House of Representatives
House Health Care Committee Chair
337 John L. O'Brien Building
PO Box 40600
Olympia, Washington 98504-0600

Dear Representative Cody:

I am writing as chair of the Washington State Board of Health to express the Board's support for the concept of House Bill 1737, regarding a joint committee to study public health financing, which your committee is scheduled to hear tomorrow.

In November 2001, a few months after the September 11 attacks, the Board published a report called, *Response Capacity During a Health Emergency—A Review of Selected Issues*. The report discussed, among other things, how Washington's public health system, though recognized as one of the best in the nation, has been weakened by a steady erosion of resources even as it has been facing new challenges. The system lacks the capacity to deal fully with the increasing day-to-day demands placed on it and to respond robustly to emerging diseases and prospective threats.

The Public Health Improvement Partnership (PHIP) has developed a public health improvement plan that lays out performance standards for the system and identifies the gap between current funding and the level of funding that would be needed to meet those standards. Closing that gap—which is somewhere on the order of \$400 million—will require a considerable commitment of new resources. This bill would create a mechanism by which legislators and others could review the current status of the public health system, explore funding strategies, and recommend a level of dedicated funding that the state should provide.

We are pleased to see that the Board, as one of the PHIP partners, would be represented on this committee, and we hope the committee will choose to build on the solid foundation of work that the PHIP has already laid down.

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I would also like to recommend an amendment. The bill would require that a final report be delivered to the Legislature by December 1, 2006. I believe the reporting deadline should be July 1, 2006 so that any recommendations concerning funding could be considered during the preparation of the Governor's proposed budget.

Thank you for your attention to this pressing public health issue.

Sincerely,



Thomas Locke, MD, MPH
Chair, Washington State Board of Health

cc: House Health Care Committee Members
Ms. Christina Hulet, Governor's Executive Policy Office
Ms. Chris Townley, Department of Health
Ms. Vicki Kirkpatrick, WSALPHO
Washington State Board of Health Members
Mr. Craig McLaughlin, Washington State Board of Health