



# LEWIS & CLARK CITY-COUNTY Health Department

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EXHIBIT 4  
DATE 1-24-05  
HB HB 60

House Human Services Committee  
Rep. Arlene Becker, Chair January 24, 2005

Madame Chairwoman, Members of the Committee. For the record, I am Joan Miles, Director of the Lewis & Clark City County Health Department. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of HB 60.

As you have heard, this is an issue the Environmental Quality Council studied quite extensively during the interim and this proposal died on a tie vote in the Council. We appreciate Rep. Harris bringing this bill forward and providing the opportunity to have this debate before the Legislature. This is an extremely difficult issue, and you will probably hear as many opinions on this issue as there are people in this room.

Local public health agencies are frequently faced with calls from the public about whether it is safe to occupy former meth labs. Right now, we have no consistent statewide policy to base a response on. There are no requirements to notify the public about properties used for meth labs. We have no way to assess contamination and potential public health risks. We don't know what chemicals might be present or what levels of particular by-products might pose health risks. We DO know, however, that many of the by-products and residuals of the meth cooking process are highly toxic and carcinogenic. Depending on concentrations, these chemicals can cause cancer, short-term or permanent brain damage and immune and respiratory system problems. And we know that these residuals can soak into rugs, furniture, walls, plaster, window coverings, etc. That is why so many other states that have seen a proliferation of meth labs, most notably Washington, Minnesota, Kansas, Missouri, Wisconsin, and most recently Arizona and Oregon have established either statewide guidelines or mandatory cleanup standards.

The only requirement in HB 60 is that subsequent occupants be notified that the property was used as a meth lab. Cleanup measures are entirely voluntary and allow a property owner to remove a property from the list of known meth labs if the standard is met. We believe this bill is an important first step in addressing this problem and will provide an important measure of protection to the public. We also believe it reflects manageable responsibilities for DPHHS as well as local health departments.

There are, however, some important things that are not in this bill. We appreciate DPHHS' willingness to take the lead on addressing this issue. However, as we mentioned consistently before the EQC, we believe the program should be administered by DEQ, the agency has the technical expertise and training to deal with chemical contaminants. Also, DEQ is provided appropriate scientific oversight and public review through the Board of Environmental Review. HB 60 is also silent on the issue of funding for the state agency role. This is a significant program that requires dedicated funding if DPHHS (or DEQ) is to manage the program successfully. Finally, I believe the Legislature needs to consider some sort of victim's fund or compensation for affected property owners. Meth labs pose a severe hardship on landlords and other property owners, such as motel owners, and this financial burden has led to covering up problems rather than cleaning them up.

We urge the Legislature to consider this problem very carefully and to support some sort of clean-up policy for the state. This is a difficult problem for property owners and local governments – and only stands to get worse as we unfortunately see the manufacture and use of meth increasing in our communities. It is critical that we take steps now to address this problem and establish consistent guidance on this issue. HB 60 represents an important, relatively simple first step that will protect not only the unsuspecting public but the property owners who are victimized by this insidious problem.

Thank you.

*"To Improve and Protect the Health of All Lewis and Clark County Residents."*