

HB2 JOINT APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE B: PHSD BUDGET PUBLIC COMMENT  
2/12/2021 8 AM

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As a representative of the Montana Public Health Association (MPHA), I stand in support of funding the essential services provided by the Public Health and Safety Division (PHSD). Although I am now retired, I am proud to speak up for public health workers and programs all over Montana. MPHA is a diverse organization that has 275 members from local health departments, colleges and universities, state government, other allied organizations, students, and retired public health workers. MPHA members participate in networking and educational opportunities that support the health of their communities across the state, at the local, tribal, and legislative level. MPHA serves as a representative voice and premier resource promoting inclusive public health practice and policies all across our great state.

This committee is considering appropriations for PHSD today. The "FTE" in this budget represent workers who can't personally advocate because they are busy doing their jobs. I used to be one of them. I had a sign in my office that "Public health saves lives every day, even if we don't know it". In this COVID-19 pandemic era, that has never been more true. Public health also has a significant influence on our economy. To have a healthy economy, we need healthy citizens and healthy communities.

Please consider that state public health infrastructure links with local health outreach, providers, and partners to touch all aspects of Montanans' live. The centralized resources, expertise, and support PHSD provides to local public health agencies are an effective channel of state and Federal tax dollars to hard-pressed communities around Montana. A cornerstone of public health is ensuring health equity for all, from big counties with small populations to large cities with under-served populations.

I personally saw the Laboratory Services Division step up to provide COVID-19 testing, education, and infrastructure support to laboratories and health care providers all over Montana. They already had the well-trained personnel in place to acquire and expertly utilize new equipment and techniques for detecting a previously unknown virus. And laboratory personnel already had relationships in place to be a resource for hard-pressed frontline workers. This is only one example of how PHSD effectively serves us all.