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LC 215: Preventing Environmental Health and Safety Risks

Consistent and accurate inspections and licensing are needed to protect people in Oregon from foodborne illness, radiation exposure, and other hazards where they live, work, and play, but lack of resources makes this increasingly difficult.

Rising costs threaten basic health and safety protections

When someone eats at a restaurant, gets their teeth cleaned at the dentist, takes their pet to the veterinarian, enjoys a tanning bed, or swims at the local community pool, they may not realize that Oregon Health Authority (OHA) or one of its local public health partners have already been there—to help keep both visitors and employees healthy and safe.

Every day, OHA and local public health agencies license and inspect restaurants, pools, lodging, and recreational facilities to prevent hazards that make people sick or hurt. They also license and monitor businesses and facilities that use radioactive materials—from x-ray devices used in health care and other settings, to tanning beds, to industrial facilities—to prevent excessive radiation exposure and respond to radiation-related emergencies.

These basic public and worker health and safety protections are paid fully by licensing and registration fees, not by general tax fund dollars. Unfortunately, due to rising costs and increased state-level responsibilities, existing fees no longer cover the costs to maintain these protections. Radiation Protection fees were last increased on January 1, 2022 and Environmental Public Health programs were increased July 1, 2019.

Next biennium, without additional revenue, state staff who work to prevent foodborne or waterborne pathogens, drownings, vermin infestations, and excessive radiation exposure will be reduced by nearly half, from 26 to 14.

Revenue shortfalls will also affect county governments. Food, pool, and lodging licensing and inspection in all but two counties is done directly by county public health staff, and the county keeps most of the associated fees. (Curry and Wallowa Counties have transferred local public health authority back to OHA.)

Inspections will happen less often, allowing potential problems and risks to public safety to worsen until they are more likely to cause critical illness or injury. In addition, it will take longer for new businesses and recreational facilities to get the licenses they need to be able to open to the public.

License fees must reflect the true costs to protect Oregonians

Environmental health programs that protect workers and the public are funded by license fees paid by the businesses and facilities that service the public. This fee structure needs to reflect the actual costs to keep Oregon residents, visitors, and workers safe.

This proposal raises fees by 50% for Radiation Protection Services licensees and registrants, and aligns restaurant, pool, lodging and recreational fees with statewide county averages. Four historically underfunded tourist program fees will increase from \$100 to \$450. Additionally, this proposal authorizes OHA to adjust future statewide restaurant, pool, lodging and recreational facilities licensing fees, through a public process, by up to three percent annually. It also allows OHA to set specific licensing fees for restaurant, pool, lodging and recreational facilities in counties that have transferred local public health authority to OHA. These direct service fees may not exceed 20% of the previous year's fee.

This proposal will enable OHA and local public health partners to continue essential inspections and licensing of:

- Over 22,000 food, lodging, and recreational facilities statewide, including 350 facilities in Curry and Wallowa counties for which OHA is directly responsible for licensing and inspection, and
- 336 radioactive material facilities, 226 tanning facilities, and 3,485 x-ray facilities.

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