



OREGON HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
House Republican Caucus

February 27, 2024

**Via Electronic Mail**

The Honorable Tina Kotek  
Governor

The Honorable LaVonne Griffin-Valade  
Secretary of State

**Dear Governor Kotek & Secretary Griffin-Valade:**

We are writing to express our deep concerns regarding the integrity and culture within the Oregon Health Authority (OHA) which, once again, was tarnished when the organization came into the limelight last week.

The facts as laid out in the Oregonian article published on Feb. 22, 2024, with respect to covering up the final beer and wine tax study for years, detailed repeated efforts over time by agency staff to deceive the Legislature and public. Once again, the ongoing work of many hard working state and local government employees is made more difficult and takes backstage due to the actions of a few. In short, these actions are unacceptable and unbecoming of a professional organization.

As we are sure you realize, the numerous public scandals over the past few years continue to erode Oregonians' confidence in and respect of our state government. A few specific scandals include:

- Former Secretary of State Shemia Fagan's questionable contract with La Mota and her subsequent resignation,
- Oregon's Public Defense mismanagement crisis,
- OHA and an OHA policy analyst being held in contempt of court by a Washington County Circuit Court judge for "misleading" or "evasive" statements,
- Oregon State Hospital escapes resulting in Federal investigations and their subsequent reports citing numerous failures,
- Department of Human Services' (DHS) continued failure to house foster children,

- OHA's lack of involvement in implementing M110 resulting in numerous ongoing issues, and
- Oregon Liquor and Cannabis Commission's "Bourbon Scandal".

OHA intentionally decided to engage in advocacy and withhold an ostensibly neutral third-party report that contradicted their proposed "Rethink the Drink" campaign. The subsequent efforts to minimize and avoid being held accountable became evident only with the emails obtained by the Oregonian. These decisions need to be immediately addressed and fixed.

As citizen legislators, we need to have full faith and confidence in state agencies being honest brokers of information. This requires timely, complete, and accurate information so we can make better informed policy decisions. Oregonians suffer when there is a breakdown of communication between branches because they then begin to further distrust government. Unfortunately, OHA is not held in high regard by many stakeholders – continued professional licensing issues, excessive contracts, poor policy and program implementation, and this scandal further erode their credibility.

On Saturday, Feb. 24, 2024, there was yet another article in the Oregonian reporting OHA entered into a \$2.7 million contract to run the Measure 110 hotline that a mere 30 people had called in the previous 75 days. Not only is this excessive and wasteful, but it is duplicative of the Alcohol and Drug Helpline, which is effective and utilized. What are the lost opportunity costs of that \$2.7 million to communities and organizations serving people who need help?

To be fair, many agency directors are trustworthy – they are area experts, professional, and competent – but they, their employees, and agencies are now lumped in with an agency perceived as biased, incompetent, expensive, and troubled.

Building trust between Oregonians and government at all levels is the goal we should all strive for. We, the undersigned, request that you immediately provide direction to all agency directors clearly establishing their responsibilities regarding building public trust, which includes establishing a professional, collaborative, working relationship with the legislature. This should include regular appearances before the House committees, in particular for OHA the Committee on Behavioral Health and Health Care, as well as one-on-one meetings with committee members.

Additionally, because many of the scandals involve human services-related agencies, we request OHA and DHS be audited with respect to unprofessional and questionable advocacy, focusing on the issues of editing, advancing, or withholding information from the Legislature to the benefit of agency goals, processes, or programs. The audit should also include the procurement decision-making process and the competencies of the people in positions with signing authority for large contracts. How are individuals being held accountable for spending the public's money?

Undoing the fallout of Measure 110 is the issue of this short session, but no legislator, Republican or Democrat, could be expected to succeed if we have flawed information. Having Director Sejal Hathi and her staff appear before the legislature to discuss how

OHA will report to the legislature accurately on the results of any new policies enacted. This would be a significant step to repairing OHA's broken relationship with this body.

A functioning legislature requires input and cooperation with competent agencies, and functioning agencies require input and policy direction from a competent legislature – we are in this together. Building the trust and competency in agencies is how we rebuild Oregon to the benefit of Oregonians, now and in the future. We are here to do just that and look forward to your partnership.

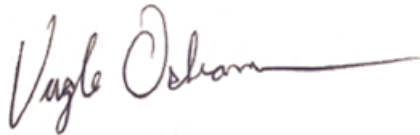
Sincerely,



Jeff Helfrich  
House Republican Leader



Court Boice  
State Representative, House District 1



Virgle Osborne  
State Representative, District 2



Dwayne Yunker  
State Representative, District 3



Christine Goodwin  
State Representative, District 4



Kim Wallan  
State Representative, District 6



Boomer Wright  
State Representative, District 9



Jami Cate  
State Representative, District 11



Charlie Conrad  
State Representative, District 12



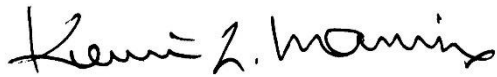
Shelly Boshart Davis  
State Representative, District 15



Ed Diehl  
State Representative, District 17



Rick Lewis  
State Representative, District 18



Kevin Mannix  
State Representative, District 21



Tracy Cramer  
State Representative, District 22



Anna Scharf  
State Representative, District 23



Lucetta Elmer  
State Representative, District 24



Brian Stout  
State Representative, District 31



Cyrus Javadi  
State Representative, District 32



James Hieb  
State Representative, District 51



E. Werner Reschke  
State Representative, District 55



Emily McIntire  
State Representative, District 56



Greg Smith  
State Representative, District 57



Bobby Levy  
State Representative, District 58



Vikki Breese-Iverson  
State Representative, District 59



Mark Owens  
State Representative, District 60