

COLUMBIA COUNTY

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January 21, 2026

To: Senator Kate Lieber, Co-Chair, and Representative Tawna Sanchez, Co-Chair – Joint Committee on Ways and Means

From: Columbia County Public Health Department / Board of Commissioners

Re: 2026 Budget

Co-Chairs Lieber and Sanchez,

Thank you for your commitment to public health over the years. While we understand that you are grappling with how to ensure the continuation of the CCOs and finance the implementation of HR 1, we implore you to maintain current budgets for public health programs, as **public health saves the health system millions each year.**

Vaccines prevent costly hospitalizations and treatments. For children, every dollar spent on vaccine programs returns \$11. For adults, every dollar spent on vaccination returns \$19 in savings.

Syphilis and congenital syphilis, which were nearly eradicated in the 2000s, have had a resurgence in recent years. Health complications of untreated syphilis are severe and costly. Public health is on the front lines doing rapid testing and treatment, preventing health complications like brain damage, organ damage, disability, and death for mothers and babies.

Nurse Home Visiting is another set of public health programs that reduces costs, both immediately and in the future. By helping parents assess what their child needs - whether in physical health, behavioral health, or material things like a bassinet – nurses provide parents with a helping hand and give them skills and confidence to advocate for their children. Nurses connect families to other services and coach them to ensure kids are more protected from Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) – which in quantity can disrupt brain development and lead to behavioral problems, reduce educational attainment, and ultimately lead to co-morbidities and sky-high health costs.

Lastly, when healthcare transformation was stood up, it was considered a three-legged stool – and CCOs were only one leg. The other legs were/are public health and early childhood, which do the prevention work necessary to bend the cost curve. While CCOs were fully funded, public health has not been yet. Cutting public health programs will only lead to more problems for you in health care budgeting.

We know you currently have the hardest job in state government and that you will do your best to make decisions that will do the least harm. Thank you for your service, and please remember that **public health saves lives and money.**

Sincerely,

Kellie Jo Smith, Chair

Casey Garrett, Commissioner

Margaret Magruder, Commissioner