



Support SB 457

June 18, 2013

On behalf of the Osteopathic Physicians and Surgeons of Oregon (OPSO) and the over 900 osteopathic physicians, osteopathic residents and osteopathic medical students we represent, I am submitting written testimony urging your support of Senate Bill 457.

We applaud the efforts this legislature has taken to improve the health care workforce in Oregon. Programs that can lower the debt burden for students considering training in the health care professions can have a significant impact on the recruitment and retention of health care providers – particularly in primary care and in Oregon’s rural areas. While Senate Bill 2, an exclusive scholarship program for students at Oregon Health and Sciences University, will provide significant incentives for health care providers, it encompasses only a fraction of medical providers training in Oregon.

HB 457 is a similar scholarship program to SB 2, but it provides a greater distribution of scholarships, allowing funds to go to health care students who show the greatest commitment to serving in Oregon’s underserved areas. SB 457 would allow osteopathic medical students from the College of Osteopathic Medicine of the Pacific (COMP-Northwest) to be eligible for the scholarship fund, as well as nursing students at community colleges, and nurse practitioner students at the University of Portland who are currently left out of scholarship opportunities.

We strongly believe one of the most important issues facing our health care system is not just the need for a strong health care workforce, but the need for a robust primary care network that allows patients access to preventive care to address health care concerns before they develop into emergency situations with costly emergency room visits and surgeries that could have been prevented.

Osteopathic physicians have a strong history of serving in primary care fields. About 60% of osteopathic medical student graduates go on to serve in primary care fields. While osteopathic physicians (DOs) currently comprise just under 7% of Oregon’s total physician network, they represent 16% of all of Oregon’s family medicine physicians. Osteopathic medicine is one of the fastest growing health care professions with over 20% of medical school students nationwide enrolled in an osteopathic program. It is crucial that we take a comprehensive look at opportunities to strengthen Oregon’s primary care workforce, and the inclusion of scholarships for primary care providers training in Oregon in addition to OHSU will have an important impact in health care access in Oregon’s underserved areas.

Sincerely,
David Walls - Executive Director