

February 20, 2015

The Honorable Greg Barretto
900 Court St. NE
Room H-384
Salem, OR 97301

Subject: HB2048

Dear Representative Greg Barreto:

Last year at this time I wrote and contacted former Representative Bob Jenson in regards to amending ORS 442.550, 442.555, and 442.560 to include Occupational Therapist. Before he left office, former Representative Bob Jenson introduced HB2048 which would amend ORS 442.55, 442.555, and 442.560 to include occupational therapist in the state loan forgiveness program. I am writing you to ask you to continue what former Bob Jenson started and help move HB2048 forward by requesting a hearing.

As a student of occupational therapy at Pacific University, and a native of Wallowa County, the success or failure of HB2048 has the potential to affect where I choose to practice once I graduate in August of this year. As a student of Pacific University I will graduate this year with a student debt a bit over \$179,000.00, a number which makes both my stomach and my Ramsey budget hurt as my monthly loan payment will be over \$1,000.00.

I have a passion for providing occupational therapy in underserved rural areas like Wallowa County. Currently, Wallowa County has been decertified to provide Medicare Hospice because the county lacks an occupational therapist. Currently, those needing occupational therapy in either the school system or to rehab after a stroke, hip or knee surgery, or help recovering from general weakness after attending an acute stay due to illness are left without these services. Currently, because of my need to repay student loans, I will have to seek future employment in an urban area as rural areas are not able to compete in the compensation they offer. Including occupational therapy in the state loan forgiveness program would allow me, and fellow occupational therapists, to reconsider where we choose to practice by removing a part of the financial hardship created by choosing a rural health practice. The including of occupational therapy in the state loan forgiveness program would also allow rural health facilities a leveraging tool for both compensation for hiring of occupational therapist and the continued retention of their occupational therapists.

HB2048 directs the Oregon Health Authority to adopt rules that would allow occupational therapists to participate in the primary care provider loan repayment program. The loan program most affected by the passing of this bill is the Oregon Partnership State Loan Repayment (SLRP). The guidelines for those sites eligible for participation in this program are sites which are located in a Health Professional Shortage Area (HPSA) (OSHU.edu, 2015). As per my conversation with Dr. Rene Grandi in Enterprise Oregon, after a two year active search for an occupational therapist they were not able to successfully employ an occupational therapist. Wallowa County as a whole is HPSA certified because of the population group of Wallowa County is certified as low income. Wallowa County is not the only county which would benefit from the passing of HB2048, currently both Union and Umatilla are also considered HPSA certified because of the same population group. Umatilla County also has the following three facilities HPSA eligibility: Confederated Umatilla Tribes Yellowhawk Clinic, East Oregon Correctional Institution, and Two Rivers Correctional Institution.

Financially, the passing of HB2048 would have minimal impact on the state fiscal status as I am only asking to be included as a primary care provider in a program which is already accounted for in the state's budget and the loan program itself requires financial participation from the eligible site.

Once again, I am asking you to continue former Representative Bob Jensen's work by requesting a hearing for HB2048. I have included a copy of the letter sent to former Representative Bob Jensen at this time last year for your reading. I will be in Salem on February 26th and look forward to meeting with you at 2:30 pm to discuss this issue further.

Sincerely,

Lorena Hawkins
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February 10, 2014

The Honorable Bob Jenson
900 Court St. NE
Room H-481
Salem, OR 97301

Subject: Amendment to ORS 442.550, 442.555, and 442.560 to include Occupational Therapist

Dear Representative Bob Jenson:

I am writing in request for an amendment to be made to ORS 442.550, 442.555, and 442.560 to include Occupational Therapists to the list of those practitioners eligible for the state loan forgiveness program for practitioners in rural areas. As a Doctorate of Occupational Therapy student, and citizen of Oregon, I have been studying the need for improved access to occupational therapy services for clients in rural areas.

In December of 2013 I had the opportunity to hear firsthand the issues surrounding the lack of occupational therapists in a rural area. Both of these events happened on the same day in Wallowa County. The first opportunity happened as I was eating lunch in a small restaurant in Joseph, Oregon. I was wearing a Pacific University shirt when an elderly gentleman at a neighboring table commented his granddaughter was attending Pacific University. He then asked me what I was studying. When I told him occupational therapy he began to tell me his story. This gentleman had a stroke earlier in the year and could not return to his home in Wallowa County to manage his rehabilitation needs because neither the local skilled nursing facility nor the hospital was able to fulfil the requirement of having an occupational therapist on staff. This gentleman had to remain over 100 miles away from his family and friends during his rehab stay. This distance not only made him feel isolated and alone but it also put an extra financial burden on he and his family as they had to travel and stay out town during his rehab.

Later in the day, I had the opportunity to accompany my mother to a doctor's appointment. During this appointment her doctor and I started talking about my career choice. While we were talking, her doctor shared with me the hospital's, Wallowa Memorial Hospital, challenge in finding an occupational therapist. They had looked for an occupational therapist for 15 months before finally giving up as they were not able to find one who was willing to live in such a remote area. She further explained how Wallowa County does not have an occupational therapist in the school district either.

In 2008 Wallow County's Medicare Hospice Program was decertified due to the inability to fulfill the occupational therapist requirements. While Wallowa Memorial Hospital is able to provide medication for in hospital terminal care under Medicare part D, with the decertification of the hospice program Medicare terminal care drugs are not available for home hospice care. Wallowa Memorial Hospital states they are still able to provide end of life care for those choosing to stay in the hospital for terminal care, but hospital stay for terminal care is far more expensive and puts more of a financial burden on the Medicare system then being able to provide end of life terminal care at home.

There have been two different amendments already made, and accepted, to ORS 442.550, 442.555, 442.560. In 2007 SB188 added Dentists and in 2010 HB3639 added Naturopath Physicians. I am requesting you make another amendment to 442.550, 442.555, and 442.560 to include occupational therapists to those eligible for the state loan repayment programs. I will be in Salem on February 26th and will stop by your office to discuss this issue further with you.

Sincerely,

Lorena Hawkins

PO Box 181

Wallowa, OR 97885

509-386-8159 * lorena@lorenahawkins.com