

February 20, 2017

The Honorable Mitch Greenlick
900 Court St. NE, H-493
Salem, OR, 97301

RE: HB 2751

Dear Representative Greenlick and Members of the Committee on Health Care:

I am writing in support of House Bill 2751 that *directs the Oregon Health Authority to adopt rules that would allow occupational therapists to participate in the primary care provider loan repayment program*. HB 2751 is a continuation of HB2048, introduced by Bob Jensen (District 48, Pendleton) to address the need for occupational therapists in underserved and rural areas. This bill would allow occupational therapists practicing in underserved areas (as defined in OAR 409-037) for at least three years to receive up to \$105,000 in loan repayment.

Occupational therapy (OT) is a profession that helps people to do the things they need to or want to do by addressing personal and environmental obstacles. I am an occupational therapy student at Pacific University, which hosts the only OT program in Oregon. This bill could have an enormous impact on where my classmates and I are able to practice when we graduate. I have a strong interest in serving rural populations, as people in rural areas tend to have high need and low access, and I believe my professional offerings could make a significant impact. However, facilities in rural areas cannot offer competitive pay, and as new professionals we will bear the burden of repaying student loans.

Occupational therapy is distinctly qualified to meet many of the needs of rural areas. Rural Americans tend to be older and are more likely to be underinsured (Office of Rural Health, 2014). Occupational Therapy provides cost-effective interventions that enhance functioning in older adults (Clark et al., 1997, 2012; Hay et al., 2002). By enabling older adults to perform necessary activities more independently, occupational therapy can promote aging in place and reduce health care costs. Furthermore, occupational therapy is the only profession shown to reduce hospital readmission rates (Rogers, Bai, Lavin, & Anderson, 2016), which further supports its ability to reduce health care spending. Rural Americans have a higher incidence of chronic conditions (Office of Rural Health, 2014), and occupational therapy has shown skill in helping people to manage chronic conditions. An example of this comes from an occupational therapist working with a physician in a primary care setting. The physician had been working with a client for years to manage his high blood pressure with relatively little success, and they were considering increasing his medication. Instead, the OT spoke with this patient about his daily routine and the challenges he faced in managing his medications. In fifteen minutes, she established a medication routine with the patient, and showed him how to set an alarm on his phone to help him maintain this routine. Months later, the patient returned significantly improved, and he and his doctor were now considering lowering his medication instead of increasing it.

Please support HB 2751, and help to bring much needed occupational therapy services to populations in need.

Respectfully,

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CC: Representative Cedric Hayden, Representative Rob Nosse, Representative Knute Buehler, Representative Brian Clem, Representative Bill Kennemer, Representative Alissa Keny-Guyer, Representative John Lively, Representative Jim Weidner