



House Committee on Education

February 3, 2020

Re: HB 4127

Chair Doherty, Vice-Chair Alonso Leon, Vice-Chair Helt, and members of the committee:
On behalf of the Asian Pacific American Network of Oregon (APANO), I am writing to express our strong support for House Bill 4127, which will improve our state's approach to children's oral health.

APANO is a statewide, grassroots organization that believes that every family and community should have the rights and resources they need to thrive. Health equity has long been a core issue for APANO, and ending disparities in oral health is a critical component of equitable health outcomes. Healthy teeth are essential for the success and wellbeing of children, while poor childhood dental health can have lifelong impacts on Oregon kids.

HB 4127 will incorporate oral health into Oregon's statewide curriculum standards and direct the Oregon Health Authority to seek federal funding to support care coordination for school-based dental programs, with an emphasis on serving children experiencing health disparities. It will also help ensure that Oregon's coordinated care organizations and public health agencies can continue to help coordinate school-based oral health programs, enabling children to benefit from these programs and receive needed follow-up care.

Oral health is critical to our children's ability to thrive. But our state's rate of childhood dental disease is one of the highest in the nation, and it disproportionately harms Pacific Islander and Asian children. Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander (NHPI) children are at the greatest risk of cavities, with nearly 3 out of 4 NHPI children at risk (72 percent, compared to 43 percent of white children). Dental pain is also a major driver of absenteeism, and children with dental disease are more likely to miss school and have lower academic outcomes. With Pacific Islander students experiencing one of the highest absenteeism rates, we must take action to remove this potential cause of missed school.

Despite having higher economic indicators, Asian children still face significant disparities in oral health, with 6 out of 10 Asian children at risk of cavities. School-based oral health care and education are important strategies to end this disparity. Oral health is also an economic justice issue, as costly emergency dental care can push families into medical debt. APANO hears directly from Asian and Pacific Islander community members that a lack of dental health care has a devastating impact on both children and adults.



Ensuring that every child grows up healthy with access to quality dental care is a major priority for APANO. This bill moves us in the right direction. We respectfully ask you to support this important legislation to improve access to oral health—and opportunity—for all of Oregon’s kids.

Sincerely,

Jenny Lee
Advocacy Director, APANO