

Testimony to a Committee Hearing

January 30, 2020

Chair Monnes Anderson and Members of the Senate Health Care Committee,

My name is Holly Erenfeld and I am a registered dental hygienist with 18 years of experience in Portland, Oregon. I am a full-time faculty member at Pacific University School of Dental Hygiene Studies, which is also the training site for the Dental therapy pilot project. I am a long-standing member of the Oregon Dental Hygienist Association. I support senate bill 1549 because Dental therapists have the potential to address the access to dental care issues in the state of Oregon. So many people in our state lack access to dental care and usually represent populations of minority groups and low-income families. Affordable dental care is simply not available to treat these important people, especially those living in rural areas.

One of the reminders of this lack of care was demonstrated last week at our annual community outreach event, Project Homeless. This program is dedicated to the homeless population and provides many health services, including dentistry. I am the coordinator of this event and this year I spent four months trying to find volunteer dentists since we had two mobile dental units scheduled. I was able to find one dentist to help. We did oral health screenings on many patients but were only able to provide treatment to eight patients. Although we spent a lot of time giving patients the tools they need to take care of their own oral health, we sent many people away who were in pain and unable to get the treatment they needed.

I am proud to be a dental educator in a program that focuses so highly on bringing access to care to the underserved. We are able to treat and change the lives of so many in our own community. There are so many more people who need care, especially those who live far away from a dental clinic like the one we have in our school. I have worked at the school for ten years and have shed many tears for people who have a poor prognosis and will probably lose their teeth due to the lack of care and education.

I truly believe the addition of a dental therapist will make an impact in our state. There are models in other states with great success, reaching more individuals who deserve quality dental health care. With dental therapy, there is a hope to make a change that could strongly affect generations to come.

The Oregon Dental Association opposes this bill. Dentists say they have concerns for safety and the quality of care. The research has shown this not to be the case and quality care is being provided in states who have passed this initiative. In my opinion, financial concerns also play a role in this opposition, with fear of taking money out of the dentists pockets. Dentists graduate with substantial student loan debt and some of them go on to acquiring large business loans. I realize this can add stress and there is a need to start repaying their debt. We have to look beyond what is best for the dentists financially and look at the people who are going to bed each night in extreme pain with no hope or parents who cannot get their children proper treatment. This bill is for the people!

I ask for your support to pass the Senate Bill 1549 to help all Oregonians. There is such a great potential for a team-based approach to dental care, where a dentist, dental

therapist, dental hygienist, dental assistant, and dental office staff can work together with the common goal of people receiving quality care.

Thank you for taking the time to read my testimony. Please contact me with any questions.

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