



COQUILLE INDIAN TRIBE

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February 4, 2020

Dai s'la,

The Coquille Indian Tribe is a federally recognized tribe whose primary geographic service area covers five counties in southwestern Oregon. Additionally Coquille tribal members live throughout the state of Oregon. The Coquille Tribe was restored to federal recognition in 1989 following termination in 1954. We provide medical, dental, pharmacy and behavioral health services directly through our health center or through purchase of care in the community.

We are writing to you today to ask you to stand with us in fully recognizing our rights and responsibilities to care for our members with high quality and culturally relevant oral health services by supporting Senate Bill 1549, authorizing Dental Health Therapists as licensed providers in Oregon.

There is an oral health crisis in Oregon, and it doesn't have to be this way. Dental therapy is an evidenced-based, culturally-relevant oral health care model brought to the United States 15 years ago by Alaska Natives seeking to reverse their oral disease epidemic. Practiced in over 50 countries, the profession continues to demonstrate its safety and effectiveness by:

- improving the patient experience of care;
- increasing and improving access and outcomes;
- building an oral health workforce with providers recruited from and returning to their communities, and;
- reducing the cost of care.

We are collaborating with healthcare providers, oral health professional associations, community-based organizations and oral health educators across the state to support a policy that is informed by other state and Tribal efforts that precede this bill. To that end we are committed to policy that ensures the following outcomes:

- Use of Commission on Dental Accreditation (CODA) standards as the measure of qualified dental therapy education programs. This allows for accessible education pathways for non-traditional students from underrepresented communities;
- Recognition of Tribal Sovereignty;
- General supervision for the full scope of dental therapy to achieve maximum benefits to patients, clinics and providers, and;
- A pathway to licensure for Oregon Pilot Project dental therapists that does not interrupt services currently being provided.

In Oregon, the Tribal Dental Health Aide Therapy Pilot Project, approved by the state in 2016, is showing that dental therapy meets the goals of Senate Bill 738: to develop innovative practices in oral health care delivery systems with a focus on providing care to populations that evidence-based studies have shown have the highest disease rates and the least access to dental care.

This pilot adds support to what we already know. Recognizing overwhelming oral health disparities, the need for systems change and the evidence-based outcomes of dental therapy, eleven states have now authorized dental therapy in some or all settings to help meet the needs of those that cannot access care. Oregon should be next.

This legislation does not require any health care systems to adopt dental therapists but merely clears the way for tribes and other underserved and underrepresented communities to choose to incorporate this provider into their oral health teams. There is much work to be done to turn the tide on oral health care disparities in Oregon, and SB 1549 is one solution we urge you to support.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Brenda Meade". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Brenda" being larger and more prominent than the last name "Meade".

Brenda Meade, Chairwoman
Coquille Indian Tribe