

Testimony in Support of House Bill 2528

March 4, 2021

Chair Prusak and Members of the House Committee on Health Care,

For the record, my name is Gail Aamodt and I reside in Hillsboro OR. I am a dental hygienist and I work in a low income dental clinic that typically treats those that do not have dental insurance.

I am writing in support of Senate Bill 2528 that would amend the Dental Practice Act to create a licensed dental therapist for Oregon.

I have seen first-hand those that have experienced access to care issues:

1. Growing up poor, I was only able to see a dentist when I was ages 6 and 16. I had rampant decay and did not know how to prevent this. I believe that is why I went to hygiene school. I did not want others to experience what I had.

2. My granddaughter lost her father at the age of 7 and the family had to go on the Oregon Health Plan in Hood River Oregon. Due to dental offices not accepting her insurance or not willing to schedule her except on their "OHP" day, the 7 year old had a tooth that started with a simple cavity develop into an abscessed that swelled up into her face 3 times. My daughter in law phoned me to tell me the dental office of record would not see her. After the 3rd abscess, the permanent tooth was finally extracted in a very traumatic appointment. To me, this is criminal.

3. I teach dental hygiene students and we provide care to a very diverse population, most of whom do not have dental insurance or a dental home. We need more providers that can provide dental care to these individuals. Dentists do not want to see them due to low reimbursement rates. If we could have a provider (dental therapist) that could provide care at a lower cost to the office, then perhaps dentists would be willing to schedule these individuals.

4. Finally, I am getting very close to retirement. I know that I probably will not have dental insurance and will eventually need restorations replaced. Knowing how expensive dental care is, I am hoping to have more, well trained, mid-level dental providers available to help the elderly population.

Dental therapists are needed in Oregon NOW! Many states have shown that this trained professional is able to provide safe and effective care.

Access to Care

- Dental therapists will work with dentists the way that a physician assistant works with a dentist
- Dental therapists will provide basic restorative dental services which will free up their dentist to provide more complex restorative dental services
- Dental therapists can help dentists provide more dental care to more people at a lower cost

Education

- This bill will require dental therapists to have completed a dental pilot project, a CODA accredited dental therapy education program, or a dental therapy education program that is substantially equivalent to a CODA accredited program and that has been approved by the Oregon Board of Dentistry.
- CODA accreditation standards require that dental therapy education programs include at least three academic years of full-time instruction or its equivalent at the college-level which is one year longer than the CODA accreditation standard for dental hygiene education programs.

Quality of Care

- This bill allows the Oregon Board of Dentistry to require written, lab or clinical exams to test the professional knowledge & skills of applicants for a dental therapy license.
- This bill requires dental therapists to work under the supervision of a dentist per a very detailed practice agreement
- Dental therapists will only be allowed to do what their supervising dentist allows them to do
- Dentists will only delegate procedures to a dental therapist if they believe it is safe & appropriate for the patient.

Evidence

- Patient data from the past 10 years shows that dental clinics in Minnesota that employ dental therapists see more patients, provide more services, and increase gross revenues according to a study from the Pew Charitable Trusts