

TESTIMONY OF CHAIRPERSON BRENDA MEADE  
OREGON HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH CARE  
IN SUPPORT OF HB 2528

March 4, 2021

Dai s' la!

Hello, I am Brenda Meade, Chairman of the Coquille Indian Tribe and the Oregon Legislative Commission on Indian Services. On behalf of the Coquille Indian Tribe it is an honor to talk to you today about Legislation that if passed, would allow tribes to deliver dental care to our Tribal Members in a way that our Elders have envisioned for a very long time.

You will hear from many different people about how the DHAT program works and why it is so important to Oregon, but I thought it might be more helpful for me to share more about my Tribe. Who we are, where we have been, and what our hopes are for our Tribe and Community. Hopefully it will help you understand why this legislation is so important to us.

With the limited time we have today I won't address the diseases that decimated our Tribes populations, or our non-ratified treaties, our forced removal to reservations, the forced assimilation programs intended to kill the Indian and save the child, or even the Federal Termination policy thrust upon us in 1954 that served to declare our extinction as the people of this land here in Southern Oregon.

Though all these horrific things that have happened in our not so distant history I feel I must mention it because it is our history and it is relevant context for this legislation.

For my time here with you today, I wish to share who the Coquille Tribe is, since the Coquille Restoration Act was approved by Congress in 1989 that Restored our Rights as a Sovereign Nation, a Federally Recognized Tribe in this United States (the last Tribe in Oregon to be restored)

Those restoration efforts were critical for many reasons. It was not only about the desire to be recognized as the people of this land, a people with a rich history and cultural values and beliefs but it was also about the need to address the huge healthcare disparities of our Tribal Members.

Healthcare has always been my Tribe's number one priority. This is because of our history and the poor access to all dental and medical services in that long period of time, along with the involuntary change in our lifeways and diet, and the denial of countless healthy traditional practices in the name of assimilation. These massive changes in our way of life were severely detrimental to the health of our Tribal members.

It was our Elders, our Grandmas and Grandpas who fought to achieve our federal recognition. These same people had a VISION to be able to take care of our people again, to offer their descendants health care, education, and to pass on our traditional values, including reverence for our Elders. Taking care of one another is a huge part of our heritage.

Since our Restoration in 1989 we immediately went to work to rebuild our nation. We regained lands to establish a reservation. In 1996 we built our Coquille Community Health Center on our reservation and began to offer health care, elder care, and family support services. Our health center allowed us the capacity to reach out to our Tribal Members no matter where they lived, to connect with them again and



to offer them support. We finally hired a Doctor and a nurse practitioner and began to grow those much-needed programs and services to meet our peoples' most critical needs.

In 1997 my Tribe then entered negotiations with the Federal Govt and later signed a compact with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to become a self-governance tribe. What that meant is that our people could decide how our federally funded health care services would be delivered.

Our goal has always been to offer the best healthcare services possible to our tribal members no matter where they live, as well as to the Communities we live in.

In light of that history and my Tribe's values, we jumped at the chance to explore this DHAT program. We didn't even second guess it.

This was the opportunity to have a dental health program that our Tribe could offer here at home. The role played by Dental Health Aide therapists similar to a nurse practitioner position.

This program allowed us to start moving forward with the support of the Northwest Portland Area Indian Health Board and other Tribes as well. We were able to see the value this program would have for my Tribe. An opportunity for Tribal Members to be educated and to ultimately come home to offer their services to members of their tribe and to create a dental home. What we have found is the expertise in a mid-level dental service that fills the gaps of care.

Today we are proudly working to build a brand-new Ko-Kwel Wellness Center in the heart of our Tribal Community, which opens this summer. It will offer a more holistic form of care that we have always envisioned

for our Tribal members and Community. We will offer primary health care, family services, elder care programs and behavioral health services as well as a pharmacy. It will also—for the first time for us-- include dental care programs that can focus on education, prevention, and outreach. It will be a place that upholds our cultural values of potlatch. A caring place, a place that people feel good at, that they are taken care of, and feels like home.

We know that we still have more work to do, healthcare needs are expanding, so we will need to grow services that will ultimately be decided by the needs of our patients. But with your support of this legislation today, it would bring another opportunity to expand dental care not only for my Tribe but for Oregonians no matter where they live. History has shown us, better access to affordable and quality healthcare and dental services creates better outcomes.

The COVID19 pandemic has intensified the health disparities that have plagued the Coquille Tribe. Despite the significant challenges that the tribe has negotiated through this past year including budgetary and a complete change in service delivery methods, the Coquille Tribe has proven once again, that we are strong and resilient. Through self-determination and the vision of our tribal government, the Coquille Tribe rapidly responded to the pandemic to continue to provide essential services, to deploy public health measures to protect the most vulnerable. The Coquille Tribe has demonstrated that we can effectively and efficiently deliver public health services, including but not limited COVID19 vaccinations, in a rapid and responsive manner. We are diligently making progress toward our goal of vaccinating all Tribal members, dependents, and employees. ·



As a result of advocacy of Oregon tribes, support of the Legislative Commission on Indian Services and the Oregon Health Authority the Coquille Indian Tribe is providing COVID19 vaccination to all Coquille tribal members, all members of our Tribal member households, to members of other federally recognized tribes and our essential employees.

To date we have provided 1500 COVID19 vaccines. We have vaccinated 80% of our service area Tribal Elders and Spouses and 50% of our Tribal Elder Oregonians.

This public health response to the pandemic is an example of my Tribe's commitment to meet the needs of our community through self-determination. Licensure of Dental Health Therapist is another. I urge the House Health Care Committee to move HB 2528 to the House floor.