

March 4, 2021

Honorable Andrea Salinas, Honorable Cedric Hayden, Honorable Rachel Prusak
Chair and Vice-Chairs, House Committee on Health Care
Oregon State Legislature

RE: Support for Oregon House Bill 2528

Dear Representatives Salinas, Hayden, and Prusak:

I support HB 2528. I believe this bill will improve access to dental care for vulnerable populations in Oregon state, including children and adults on Medicaid, the uninsured, and others who find themselves locked out of the dental care system.

My support is based on my clinical and scientific expertise. I have been a clinically active dentist for 15 years. I am a board-certified pediatric dentist and I have a PhD in public health. In 2018, I was named Pediatric Dentist of the Year by the American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry. I am a Professor at the University of Washington, where I teach dentistry and conduct NIH-funded public health research. I have published on Alaska's dental therapy program. I have provided dental care in Alaska Native communities and have observed dental therapists in practice and the benefits they can have on communities.

Dental therapy is an evidence-based solution and is safe. Dental therapists have been providing safe and high-quality care to children and adults in Alaska Native communities since 2005. Dental therapists are supervised by licensed dentists and provide a very limited set of services – preventive care like fluoride varnish in addition to basic restorative care, like small fillings and removal of loose teeth. I teach dental students these procedures – these are procedures learned early on in dental school. Thus, it's not surprising that dental therapists provide care that is no different from the care provided by dentists. Studies show the quality of care is the same, the level of post-treatment complications is the same. There is no difference, for these limited set of services.

My research shows dental therapists improve access to dental care. Dental therapists have been shown to improve access to dental care – both for children and adults. I know this because I led a team of researchers at the University of Washington that published a series of studies to show that dental therapists improve access to dental care. We analyzed 10 years of data from Alaska Native communities. We found that in communities where dental therapists provided care, more children and adults got preventive care, which helps to prevent cavities. In these same communities, more children and adults also kept their natural teeth – meaning fewer children and adults got teeth removed or extracted because of cavities that were beyond fixable – and there were fewer dental emergencies. The individuals we interviewed in Alaska Native communities were satisfied with the care provided by dental therapists.

There are thousands of vulnerable children and adults in Oregon who cannot access dental care – it is a public health crisis. There is overwhelming scientific evidence in favor of dental therapists. As a scientist, I think it is important to implement evidence-based solutions. Many times, legislation may not be evidence-based because we simply do not have the evidence. House Bill 2528 is an evidence-based solution.

I urge members of the Committee to vote YES on House Bill 2528.

Thank you very much for your time. Please call me at 206-650-7652 or email me at donaldchi78@gmail.com if you have questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Donald Chi". The signature is written in a cursive style with a prominent initial "D" and a trailing flourish.

Donald Chi, DDS, PhD

Professor

Lloyd and Kay Chapman Endowed Chair for Oral Health

University of Washington School of Dentistry and School of Public Health