

Advantage Dental

March 4, 2021

House Committee on Health Care
900 Court Street NE
Salem, Oregon, 97301

Subject: **House Bill 2528 – Support**

Dear Chair Prusack and Committee Members;

Advantage Dental is a Dental Care Organization providing services to more than 380,000 Oregon Health Plan (OHP) members through a network of 59 offices, most of which are located in rural counties. Our organization is part of the Dental Access Campaign and is in support of House Bill 2528.

Over a million people in Oregon live in areas that have a shortage of dentists and twenty-four rural and frontier primary care service areas have no full time dentist. These are the communities Advantage Dental serves and we're often the only dental access point.

According to a 2017 report by the Oregon Health Authority (OHA) Office of Health Analytics, only 41% of Oregon dentists accept Medicaid, and almost half of those limit the numbers they are willing to see to less than 25% of their patient mix. Low-income families, families in rural and frontier counties and families of color are disproportionately impacted resulting in higher rates of untreated dental disease and difficulty accessing preventive services for these groups.

Recently, OHA released the 2021 Healthcare Workforce Needs Assessment that pointed to the need for improved DIVERSITY, DISTRIBUTION and SUPPLY of health care providers, including oral health providers. The report also recommends the use of care delivery models that improve patient access. Allowing licensure of dental therapists gives us an opportunity to address the shortcomings identified in OHA's Assessment, and improve access to oral health services for Oregonians most in need.

Advantage Dental recruits nationally for dentists and offers a wide range of incentives, including signing bonuses and student loan repayment. Compensation and incentives to practice with our group in rural parts of the state are very attractive compared to market but we continue to experience difficulty in hiring and retaining dental providers for these offices. To meet the need, we often have to rotate dentists to underserved areas or hire temporary providers resulting in episodic care and gaps in coverage.

I was a member of the arbitration group in 2011 that negotiated terms for dental pilot projects. The legislation passed then has served its purpose well and shown the value and contributions dental therapists make to improving access while providing quality care under the supervision of a dentist.

We knew in 2011 there was an oral health crisis in Oregon, and now, 10 years later, it is past time to realize the vision of the dental pilot legislation and begin licensing dental therapists to expand the oral health workforce. Since 2011 we've gained 10 more years of evidence from other states that dental therapy is safe, effective and well accepted by patients, and we have 5 years of evidence in our own state from pilot project #100.

Even when HB 2528 is passed, it will take time to write rules, it will take time to expand the educational infrastructure for dental therapists, and then it will take more time for students to graduate. If we do not act now, we will be further behind in offering the care many Oregonians are currently going without.

We respectfully request your support in passing HB 2528.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Gary W. Allen".

Gary W. Allen, DMD, MS
Vice President, Clinical Services
Advantage Dental