

March 16th, 2021

Re: Supporting HB 2528

Chair Prusak, Vice Chair Hayden, Vice Chair Salinas, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Maureen O'Sullivan. I am a dedicated Advanced Dental Therapist and a dental hygienist supporting the mission and goals of C.A.R.E. Clinic, a nonprofit clinic serving the underserved in South East rural Minnesota. I work under a signed collaborate management agreement with local dentist. While the dentist works in his private practice, I am caring for the underserved in the community. I am able to offer preventive, restorative, and urgent dental needs to the underserved in the community. Without my help, many if not all the restorative and preventive service would be lost. Prior to my arrival, community dental services were limit to extractions on Tuesday evenings. Since I have arrived, trips to the ER are replaced by a visit to the C.A.R.E clinic and the once underserved community has a dental home!

Increasing access to basic dental care not only reduces preventable cavities but also supports overall health. Lack of access to routine, preventive dental care has long been an issue for many Oregonians, especially in rural communities, communities of color, and low-income communities across our state. A situation worsened by COVID-19, which has severely restricted dental care.

Evidence shows that the same Oregonians who were already impacted by significant barriers to routine and preventive oral health care are those that are most disproportionately affected by COVID-19 and its economic impacts. Dental therapy addresses unmet oral health care needs in rural and underserved communities and provides huge cost savings to the overall health system.

I urge you to support HB 2528 and allow the Oregon Board of Dentistry to license dental therapists. Dental therapists are primary oral health care professionals with the training to provide the basic dental care that many Oregonians can't get today — exams, fillings, and simple extractions. Evidence is clear that dental therapists have been safely and successfully practicing in the U.S. for more than 15 years and they are currently working in Oregon under successful but limited pilot programs.

The dental clinic within C.A.R.E. Clinic supports HB 2528 because caring for the underserved helps establish community health.

In this year where the state budget is in crisis, dental therapy is a budget-neutral workforce option. Dental therapy not only improves access to care, but also offers a tool for future economic stability to dental clinics. By focusing on a smaller set of commonly needed procedures, dental therapists can be educated in a shorter time period and at a much lower cost than dentists. This makes dental therapists highly cost-effective to employ, and cost-effective for delivering care to communities most in need.

Most importantly, dental therapists deliver high-quality care. This has been confirmed time and time again. In August 2020, a dental therapy education program was accredited by the American Dental Association's Commission on Dental Accreditation (CODA), the governing body that accredits all U.S. education programs for dentists and dental hygienists. The newly accredited Alaska Dental Therapy Education Program offers a curriculum that supports our goals of creating innovative, high-quality, community-based health care right here in our own state.

Please support HB 2528 and expand dental care access in Oregon!

Maureen O'Sullivan

C.A.R.E. Clinic, Red Wing, MN