

Testimony in Support of House Bill 2528
May 10, 2021

Chair Patterson, Vice-Chair Knopp and Members of the Committee,

For the record, my name is Lisa Rowley, I am a licensed dental hygienist, and I reside in Portland, Oregon. I am also the Advocacy Director for the Oregon Dental Hygienists' Association (ODHA). The ODHA supports House Bill 2528 that would create a licensed dental therapist for Oregon.

Dental therapists are midlevel dental care providers who work with a dentist in the way that a physician assistant works with a physician. Dental therapists can expand access to dental care for Oregonians by helping dentists to provide more dental care to more people at a lower cost.

Dental therapists can provide routine dental care such as drilling & filling teeth, placing temporary crowns & extracting loose teeth, thereby freeing up the dentist to provide more complex dental care to other patients at the same time. Dentists in other states have found that adding a dental therapist to their practice is an efficient and cost-effective way to expand access to dental care while maintaining the safety and quality of dental care that all patients deserve. 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.

Oregon's Dental Pilot Project #100 has already demonstrated that dental therapists, working alongside dentists in tribal communities, are providing safe, effective and culturally appropriate dental care to our native population that has long suffered from a high incidence of dental disease and limited access to dental care. This same model can be used to help dentists extend dental care to other vulnerable and underserved populations throughout Oregon.

The Commission on Dental Accreditation (CODA) has developed nationally accepted accreditation standards for dental therapy education programs that are being used to develop and evaluate dental therapy education programs. 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 standards require for dental hygiene education programs. CODA has an obligation to the public, the profession and prospective students to ensure that the dental therapy education programs that they accredit are providing appropriate education, training and experiences for dental therapy students, just as they do for dental and dental hygiene students.

The Oregon Dental Access Committee has negotiated in good faith to address concerns raised by both legislators and the Oregon Dental Association (ODA). At the request of the ODA, some procedures now require a stricter level of supervision that will prohibit all dental therapists from providing these services to underserved patients in remote areas where no dentist is available. It should be noted that the bill already requires each dental therapist to work under the supervision of a dentist who has determined which services the dental therapist can and cannot provide. Each dental therapist will only be allowed to provide services that their dentist allows them to do. And each dentist will only delegate services to a dental therapist if the dentist believes that it is safe & appropriate for the patient.

We urge you to support HB 2528-A with the following changes:

- Include the intent section from the -4 Amendment to help guide rulemaking and implementation of this bill
- Clarify that graduates of education programs that were approved as part of an Oregon pilot project are eligible for licensure even if the pilot project has ended.
- Remove the arbitrary date by which graduates of CODA accredited programs can apply for licensure. In its current form, the bill limits applicants before 2025 to only those that are part of an active pilot project. If another education program in Oregon were to be accredited before 2025, those graduates would no longer be able to apply for licensure as the bill is currently drafted.

In closing, the Oregon Dental Hygienists' Association supports House Bill 2528 because it will allow dentists to work with dental therapists to expand access to dental care in Oregon.

Thank you for considering this testimony.

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Advocacy Director
Oregon Dental Hygienists' Association