

Testimony in Support of House Bill 2528

March 19, 2021

Chair Prusak and Members of the House Committee on Health Care,

For the record, my name is Wilber Ramirez-Rodriguez and I reside in Hillsboro OR. 97124. I am an expanded practice dental hygienist and I work as a faculty and providing direct patient care to the underserved and the underinsured population Multnomah, Washington, Yamhill, Clark, and Polk Counties.

I am writing in support of Senate Bill 2528 that would amend the Dental Practice Act to create a licensed dental therapist for Oregon. This testimonial is on behalf of all my patients who do not have access to this form of testimonial.

On a typical outreach dental hygiene clinic day of 8 patients, approximately 50 to 70 percent of these patients need follow-up for simple fillings and extractions. Thanks to Medical Teams International (MTI) and Virginia Garcia Memorial Health Center, we are able to refer some of our patients to them for dental emergency needs but not for simple fillings and extractions. These patients since they have nowhere to go they will need to wait years for their teeth to become an emergency so they can be seen by Virginia Garcia and MTI. It is not fair to play with the health of people who due to economy, distance, or other barriers can have access to humanitarian service.

As a dental provider, I see one of the biggest barriers to access to care in the United States is the cost of dental services, and the community I serve does not have the economic resources to afford the high cost of dental treatments. The health provider should not choose the health career for personal financial enrichment but service to the community should be the main vocation. I see that dental treatments are very expensive or free, but unfortunately, there are no clinics that offer free dental services unless there is one event a year like Give Kids a Smile. For this reason, we need in our society accessible programs for those who need them most, such as the services of dental therapists at an appropriate cost that can be accessible for anyone.

Dental therapists can help the dental team to reach more people to get access to dental care.

Dental therapist will help close the gap to access of care in Oregon

Based on my experience of being in the first dental therapy pilot program and being previously trained as a dentist in Peru. I can assure you that the pilot program is a higher education program. To get into the program, firstly the applicant must have a license with experience as a dental hygienist (RDH), have a restorative permit with experience in patient care, in my case a bachelor's degree. The education in this pilot program is very similar or equal to the education for a dentist. The textbooks and literature are the same as those used at the University of Oregon Health and Science (OHSU), the number and hours of pre-professional practice exceed what is required of a dental student. The dental therapy student is much more careful with each aspect of patient care and documentation again that is because of previous experience as a health care provider.

Dental Therapy the same as any other health care program to be allowed to practice and get a license will be required written, lab, or clinical exams to test the professional knowledge & skills of each applicant to obtain a dental therapy license.

Evidence shows that similar programs to Dental Pilot Project #300 in other states such as Minnesota have a great impact on access to dental care for patients with not access o little access to dental care.

Dental Pilot Project #300 will be a great fit for a dental team. This will impact greatly the access to dental care for the underserved and uninsured community in Oregon.

In closing, I urge you to support House Bill 2528 because it will allow dentists to work with dental therapists to expand access to dental care in Oregon.

Sincerely,

Wilber Ramirez-Rodriguez EPDH