

Senate Committee on Health Care 900 Court St. NE Salem, OR 97301  
Subject: Substantial Concerns with House Bill 2528  
Dear Members of the Senate Committee on Health Care,

We are all in favor of improving access to care for all Oregonians. However this bill will not increase access to care in Oregon.

I have been encouraged by amendments to the initial version of HB2528. Issues pertaining to educational requirements, scope of practice, and supervision – areas on which we previously shared concerns – have been addressed in part.

The bill states that 51% of a dental therapist practice must be limited to underserved populations as defined by OHA. When I looked up underserved areas and populations on OHAs website it lists almost the entire state as underserved including parts of Portland, Washington County, Yamhill County, Clackamas County, Marion County, Lane County, and only seemed to exclude parts of the city of Portland and Gilliam, Wheeler, and Deschutes Counties. So essentially the dental therapists can practice anywhere in the state. This tells me that the 51% requirement has no real meaning or limitation to the practice of dental therapists.

There are currently around 4.2 million people living in Oregon and around 1200 dentists. This equates to 3,500 potential patients per dentist. The CDC states in 2021 that the percentage of patients 18 and over who had a dental visit in the last year is 64.9%. That reduces the number of people to dentists to 2271. Even if we had 100% of Oregonians wanting to regularly go to a dental appointment, 3,500 patients is manageable for the current dentists already in Oregon.

The real issue isn't that we don't have enough dentists to provide access, but that the dentists we have are poorly distributed to adequately give access to the more rural counties. I would highly suggest that you take a minute to look at where the lowest density of dentists are located and limit the practice to those counties and not open the entire state to dental therapists. If you do not more specifically limit the locations of practice, then we will not have more access to care in Douglas, Coos, Curry, Lake, Harney, Malheur, Grand, Baker, Union, or Wallowa counties. What we will have is more dental access where we do not need it, in Multnomah, Washington, Yamhill, Marion, and Lane counties.

If this is the case, then we truly do not need dental therapists at all.

Respectfully,  
Amy R. Wark DMD