

Dear Members of the Joint Committee On Ways and Means Subcommittee On Education:

My name is Dr. Eric Blake. I have been a licensed Naturopathic Physician in the State of Oregon since 2005. I reside in the Southwest Hills of Multnomah County and I direct a clinic in downtown Portland, Oregon. The clinic has been in operation since 1998 in the Medical Dental Building behind the Multnomah Central Public Library. We currently employ 12 support staff who assist the 3.5 FTE physicians and the full-time resident who deliver care. We provide care at approximately 10,000 clinic visits annually. During the CoVid pandemic our clinic remained open to provide essential services including screening and testing for CoVid19. We implemented universal mask use before it was made mandatory and drive up testing before it became common.

Naturopathic Physicians have been licensed in the State of Oregon beginning in 1927. Our national professional journal – The Naturopath and Herald of Health - published the text of the 1926 Oregon bill in 1927 and I have a copy of that journal in my collection. For almost 100 years Oregon - Naturopathic Physicians have been regulated by an independent state board. For almost 100 years our profession has delivered babies, stitched wounds, casted fractures, and provided comprehensive integrated care to Oregonians - long before the concept was popular or even considered legitimate.

There is now a proposal to remove our independent board. A board that has for almost 100 years protected Oregonians while assuring the qualifications of their providers. The proposal would apparently put us under the Oregon Health Authority. When the CoVid Vaccine was rolled out the NDs were lumped together in the same 4th priority tier as massage therapists by the OHA. My thoughts when I saw that, after having been open the entire pandemic as a front line provider- ‘the OHA clearly does not understand who we are and what we do.’ In conversation with OHA staff previous to this I had already been verbally told that we are ‘not really considered physicians’, and here in their prioritization was more evidence of their disconnect from who we are and what we do.

If the OBNM needs to adjust fees to address their fiscal viability – then so be it. Audit the costs involved and adjust the fee structure so that the Board is fiscally viable. Otherwise, to throw away a functioning Board to save a few dollars would be ‘penny wise but pound foolish’. To do so would not serve the needs of the thousands and thousands of Oregonians that our doctors attend to, it could disrupt and potentially undermine that care at a time of critical need. In other words, if it’s not broken, don’t fix it.

Sincerely,

Eric Blake ND, MSOM, Dipl. Ac.