

Subject: Opposition to Senate Bill 441, Section 3

Dear Senator Patterson and members of the Senate Committee on Health Care,

My name is Jill Lomax and I am a dental assisting educator from Keizer, Oregon. I am writing to express concern regarding section 3 of Senate Bill 441.

Although I have been a dental assisting instructor for 10+ years, I am representing myself today as a dental assistant concerned about the future of the workforce.

As a dental assistant, I know first-hand on the challenges that the workforce shortage poses on our dental community. Many of the dental assisting programs have responded to this need by increasing their class size and offering curriculum through non-traditional methods.

However, according to the American Dental Association (ADA), enrollment in dental assisting programs is down 45% across the nation including here in Oregon.

Simply put, the interest in becoming a dental assistant is declining.

ADA's Health Policy Institute, along with the American Dental Assistants Association, the American Dental Hygienists Association, the Dental Assisting National Board (DANB), and Ignite DA, conducted an extensive study in 2022 and found that the top four factors why dental assistants are leaving the dental field are:

1. Insufficient Pay
2. Feeling Overworked
3. Workplace Culture
4. Lack of Opportunity for Growth

To identify the strategies for shoring up the workforce, ADA's Health Policy Institute identified key strategies, two of which included:

- Responsive compensation is a must
- Workplace culture cannot be overlooked

In addition, DANB hosted a summit in the summer of 2022 and identified cross-organizational initiatives that could be undertaken to assure that our future workforce needs are met. Some of the initiatives include:

- Form a workplace coalition to address low pay and benefits
- Improve workforce development through marketing campaigns
- Enhance state licensing

**As the American Dental Association's Health Policy Institute pointed out, shoring up the workforce pipeline will require long term changes.**

Understandably, the ODA is trying to support dentists and dental professions across the state by increasing the workforce. Although on the outside, it is reasonable how one might think that reducing education and making it free to the public would increase the workforce. The concern, however, is that reducing the standards will inadvertently decrease the dental assisting workforce and access to dental care instead of its intended goal of increasing it.

I ask that you consider these points:

- The dental assisting standard set by the Commission of Dental Accreditation is 900 hours (approximately 9 months). Shorter educational programs will lower the standard, lower the quality, lower the pay, and thus, lower the future interest in joining the dental assisting field
- Shorter educational programs will decrease patient safety and decrease quality of care
- There are already dental assisting training modules available at a very reasonable price through the DALE foundation that support on the job training and are updated regularly by subject matter experts
- There is already a non-credit Community College Dental Assisting program that can be completed in either a hybrid or remote model accessible to rural areas of Oregon. This program is already being utilized by Kaiser Permanente and others to train on the job.

**Since training modules and remote programs are already available, I ask that you amend Senate Bill 441 and remove section 3.**

In the spirit of collaboration, I believe a better solution to the workforce shortage would be by the ODA, the Oregon Community College Dental Assisting Programs, and the Oregon Dental Assisting Association working together to develop dental assisting career opportunity information to educate others on the pathways to become a professional dental assistant in Oregon and recruitment tools that would encourage interest in the profession.

As healthcare professionals, we often explain to patients that treating the symptom is not going to fix the problem. Let's do the same for Oregon's dental assisting workforce and use the already published research by the American Dental Association's Health Policy Institute and DANB as a guide to move forward.

Respectfully,

Jill Lomax, EdM, CDA, EFDA-RF

Dental Assisting Educator, Keizer, OR

Sources:

Dental Workforce Shortages: Data to Navigate Today's Labor Market (2022)

[https://www.ada.org/-/media/project/ada-organization/ada/ada-org/files/resources/research/hpi/dental\\_workforce\\_shortages\\_labor\\_market.pdf](https://www.ada.org/-/media/project/ada-organization/ada/ada-org/files/resources/research/hpi/dental_workforce_shortages_labor_market.pdf)

Dental Assistant Future Workforce Stakeholder Forum Summit Report (2022)

[https://danbsfprodassets.azureedge.net/assets/docs/default-source/email-assets-to-share/stakeholder-forum-summary.pdf?sfvrsn=c9af10d1\\_1](https://danbsfprodassets.azureedge.net/assets/docs/default-source/email-assets-to-share/stakeholder-forum-summary.pdf?sfvrsn=c9af10d1_1)