

February 15, 2023

RE: House Bill 3223 and House Bill 2996

TO: The House Committee on Behavioral Health and Health Care

FROM: Joyce Vaughan, BS, CDA, EFDA

Dear Chair Nosse and Members of the Committee,

My name is Joyce Vaughan. I am retired from the field of dentistry after 43 years as a chairside assistant, office assistant, and educator.

In the 1980's, dental assistants from across the State of Oregon came to the capital building in Salem to promote a bill that would offer licensing for dental assistants. It was the intent to standardize the education and training levels for all dental assistants in the state. With standardized education, assistants would have the knowledge and skills to work in any dental office, including specialties such as Oral Maxillofacial Surgery and Orthodontics. Although this was an excellent plan that would benefit dentists and protect the public, it was rejected. Dentists indicated that there was a "shortage of dental assistants" and this (adding licensing) would create hardship on them as they tried to find enough staff for their offices.

The Oregon Dental Assisting Educators (credentialed dental assistants who taught in the community college programs that were accredited by the Commission of Dental Accreditation) determined to enhance our programs and meet every Standard of Accreditation, giving the students the best education possible, and providing dentists and the public with highly qualified assistants to participate in dental treatment.

Currently, there are hundreds of graduates from these Accredited Programs working in dental offices around the state. There are also MANY assistants in offices and clinics who have had NO formal training, and they simply "do what someone shows them". The public, as a whole, is not aware of this. The risk is the mistakes they make that no one knows about until the treatment fails.

As is true in Dental Assisting Programs and at the Dental School at Oregon Health and Sciences University, not all students who enter educational programs actually graduate. This is a screening protection for the public. Without and standardized certificate or educational training, the filter is lost and the public is at risk.

House Bills 3223 and 2996 before you today propose to delete or diminish the current levels of education and training for dental assistants. Individuals who are shown what to do in an office (or online) only get partial information. The ADA Accredited Dental Assisting Programs were created by licensed dentists, hygienists, and dental assistants to offer what should be considered the minimum standard of education for all dental assistants. Some dentists are asking for dental assistants to be allowed to administer anesthetic. The requests for assistants to do more tasks is going up, while dentists are asking for education to go down.

To diminish or delete any of the current certificates or regulations for dental assistants is to diminish the health care of every resident in the State of Oregon. You are asking patients to pay continued rising prices for dental care, while lowering the training standards for personnel, and not paying the assistants a living wage. There isn't a "shortage of dental assistants"; they simply have moved on to other professionals that offer better wages, benefits, and respect.

Thank you.