

Dear House Behavioral Health and Health Care Committee,

My name is Katheryn O'Brien and I am a patient of a licensed naturopathic doctor (ND). I would like to share my experience working with my doctor, and ask you to support HB2555.

Like an increasingly vast number of people, I have battled disabling complex chronic illness for many years, and like many, I've seen countless healthcare providers of diverse varieties, including traditional MDs, before arriving at naturopathy. While I've found some help and support across the spectrum of medical providers, and I respect their importance, it's only after finding naturopathic doctors that I gained imperative diagnoses' and the breadth and depth of care that I need, which has given me a viable possibility of recovery. In all my previous time navigating the healthcare system in search of help and healing, I've fundamentally been underserved and dismissed, which has had devastating and debilitating consequences that I suspect may have been mitigated by earlier naturopathic intervention.

I live in Oregon as a result of my quest for recovery and my growing dependence and need for familial support in the process. I've remained here in large part because there's a precedent of great and accessible natural medicine that I rely on. Upon moving here, I was initially very encouraged to find a uniquely great local healthcare system that provided access to the naturopathic healthcare that I require, and empowered me to make progress towards reclaiming independence. Unfortunately, it has since become increasingly difficult for me to access the vital healthcare I need, as insurance has increasingly stopped covering it. I lost my previous doctor when she had to stop taking my insurance, and I've since not been able to find a doctor I need in-network, so the majority of my medical care is now out of pocket. That is a huge strain on me, my family, and on my incredibly hard working doctor who has been burdened with reducing her rates to retain patients like me who she has dedicated to serving.

The provider that I, above all, value for my regular care is my ND. The clinical expertise and unique training that my doctor offers, coupled with the dedicated time and attention given to all my concerns, makes her irreplaceable to me.

My ND manages the majority of my healthcare needs, whether it be general visits, necessary lab and imaging tests, preventive screening exams or vital prescriptions. She also refers me to medical specialists as needed, working in partnership with other providers to offer a truly integrative approach to my healthcare.

My ND takes the time to thoroughly investigate my concerns, and to teach me about my health and how to best manage it through a diversely multifaceted approach that addresses all aspects, in addition to prescribing medications or alternative treatments. She and other naturopaths I've worked with also take time to continually research and educate themselves, adapt, and strategize about how best to help me. This is the best type of preventive medicine and has saved me from worse illness or more expensive treatments down the line.

Unfortunately, naturopathic doctors in Oregon are not being fairly compensated for the care they give me and for the important role they play in our state's healthcare workforce. Naturopathic doctors are paid about half of what all the other provider types

(MDs, DOs, NPs and PAs) are paid for the same exact billing code and same service provided. This discrepancy puts my doctor on unstable financial ground and puts my access to my provider of choice in jeopardy. Naturopathic doctors are being forced to drop insurance plans to remain financially viable.

It is essential that I be able to utilize my health insurance to see my doctor. I cannot afford to pay out of pocket for my regular and preventive care. It's not only unfair, it's unrealistic. I need my ND to be in network with my insurance, to stay in business, and to be able to sustain the level of excellent intensive healthcare she provides me.

This issue is of critical importance to me, the doctors I depend on, and to many in the larger community of those like us and those who care about us, many of whom are unreasonably tasked with supporting us when the basic support to which we should be entitled to is unavailable.

I desperately desire to recover independence and to become a productive member of society, and I've worked hard along with much help from naturopathic doctors to move towards that goal. If enabled to do so, I could relieve the otherwise ongoing burden of my healthcare on the system. Being faced with an increasingly uphill battle just to access the healthcare I need, on top of my daily battle for my health and survival, is unreasonable and unmanageable.

I am asking you to please vote yes on HB2555 and ensure access to licensed naturopathic doctors.

Sincerely,

Katheryn O'Brien
Portland, OR