

17 April 2023

Senate Committee on Health Care

Re: House Bill 3223

Dear Chair Senator Patterson, Vice-Chair Senator Hayden, and members of the Committee;

House Bill 3223 is an example of the growing trend in our state that “*need*” defines what is right, as if *need* is a source of some sort of entitlement. It promulgates the idea that people must merely *want* something in order for it to be accepted as a best course of action. HB 3223 suggests that the earned is too difficult, but the unearned is a right. It fosters an attitude that one can achieve a goal without effort or cost. Worse, this bill having made it this far, condones the lowering of standards for certain health care providers.

Written examinations have a long and successful history in a wide-ranging demographic of the population of being a proven measure of determining minimum competency in a wide variety of fields. And many professions, (such as my own - U.S. Merchant Marine) require a sign-off – or attestation - by others in order to receive a certificate or license. Eliminating the requirement that dental assistant applicants pass a written examination benefits Oregonians precisely how? It doesn't. Whether it benefits the examinees themselves is debatable.

My take-away from Representative Pham's presentation is that there are some costs and effort involved in obtaining a certificate as dental assistant. Is that news to anyone, particularly when pursuing a certificate of competency from the state or professional organization? Just what is inherently wrong with a goal one has to strive and work for? What is wrong with being challenged? Growth and mastery of a subject come only to those who strive, not those who want the easy way out. How does this bill enhance ones ability to cope with adversities?

The presentation showed there are 18 sites that offer dental assistant courses and 6 sites for testing. Was anyone surprised the majority of sites lie along the I-5 corridor? His presentation included – complete with a full page warning—unpleasant pictures showing teeth gone bad, as if he was talking to a classroom of elementary school children. Isn't that tactic widely known as theatrics? People already know what happens when dental hygiene is neglected. Using that example, implying that having people take a written exam is responsible for poor dental health in the population is at best naïve and at worse just plain deceptive.

Are candidates for Dental Assistant certificates now so terrified, so bewildered, and so impotent that they seek immunity from having to prove their competency? Have they no faith in their own strengths and abilities?

Such a burden! Such an onerous task... being required to pass a written examination of ones knowledge of a particular subject. Have the supporters of HB 3223 considered how will this affect what's left of our *work ethic* by enshrining in law the idea that if a goal is difficult to achieve, then the solution is simply to lower the goal posts? How does this inspire excellence? It doesn't. It inspires mediocrity and the attitude of, "it's good enough for who it's for."

The written testimony submitted for the February 13th public hearing shows a firm majority of voters are not in favor of this bill, e.g., 93 writers opposed, including Oregon Dental Assistants Association, and only 2 in support—one of which was the sponsor of the bill. How, during the March 7th work session, the House Committee on Behavioral Health and Health Care construed those number into a unanimous vote to 'pass' this bill is a mystery.

I'd like to believe that our elected officials, particularly *Representatives*, reflect – and respond – to the will of the people they represent. This manifestly opposing move by the Committee, this disregard of constituents wishes, is more than just a little puzzling.

That Committee's actions are reminiscent of another bill, HB 2015, during the 2019 Regular Session, in which the legislature voted 39-21 to remove proof of legal status as a requirement for obtaining a driver's license or ID. This was against the express will of the people that was so clearly shown earlier with Ballot Measure 88. Ballot Measure 88, a veto referendum, which would have provided driver cards to those who can't prove their legal residency, failed by a huge margin, 66% to 34% statewide, passing in only one out of thirty-six counties in our state.

The action of the House Committee on Behavioral Health and Health Care indicate the trajectory of HB 3223 is headed in the same direction – that of ignoring the will of the people. Considering the testimony already heard it should be clear that voters (whose teeth, both yours and mine, will be worked on) are positively not in favor of doing away with the requirement that dental assistant candidates take – and pass – a written examination in proficiency before earning a certificate as Dental Assistant.

Not only do I urge the Committee to table this bill I urge the Committee to listen to the voice of the citizenry. Passing this bill will do nothing to bolster confidence in our legislators.

Sincerely,

Richard Wisner 