



OCCA Testimony on HB 3223 and HB 2996

Senate Committee on Healthcare, April 19, 2023

Chair Patterson, Vice-Chair Hayden and members of the committee, for the record, I'm John Wykoff Deputy Director for the Oregon Community College Association. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today on HB 3223 and HB 2996.

Community colleges are major contributors to Oregon's dental careers pipeline and in addressing workforce demands in this field.

Community Colleges share the goal of making career training accessible to students of all backgrounds, and particularly students from systemically marginalized communities, and the need to address barriers to education and entry into a career.

HB 3223 and HB 2996 attempt to address workforce shortages and barriers to career placement by removing the requirement for national board exams in dental assisting. Community college dental assisting educators have voiced serious concerns that removing this requirement could have significant negative or unintended consequences and that the exams are play a critical role in maintaining safety and high standards:

Lowering standards of education: The national exams for dental assistants are designed and vetted by professional psychometricians and subject matter experts to ensure that dental assistants meet a certain standard of education and knowledge in the field. Removing this requirement could lead to a decline in the quality of dental assistant education in Oregon.

National exams for dental assistants are routinely reviewed by subject matter experts and updated to reflect changes in the field, ensuring that dental assistants are up-to-date with the latest developments and technologies.

Patient safety: Dental assistants play an important role in ensuring patient safety. Without the necessary knowledge and skills, dental assistants could potentially cause harm to a dental patient. National exams help to ensure that dental assistants have the necessary knowledge and skills to perform their job safely and effectively. Oregon also provides certification pathways that empower dental assistants with more direct patient care responsibilities than many other states, making consistent, high-quality training even more important.

Maintaining the reputation of the dental assisting profession: Dental assistants are an important part of the dental profession, and their work is integral to the overall health of patients. By requiring national exams, the Oregon Board of Dentistry can help ensure that dental assistants are viewed as highly skilled and knowledgeable professionals.

Reflective of the concerns raised by community college dental assisting educators, we recommend convening an interim workgroup of stakeholders, including dental assisting educators, to bring legislation to the 2024 Session addressing barriers to dental career entry while maintaining high standards for education and patient safety.