



May 10, 2023

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

My name is Jessica August and I am the Director of Dental Sciences at Portland Community College (PCC). I am a Certified Dental Assistant (CDA) and Registered Dental Hygienist (RDH). As an allied dental educator, I am deeply committed to educating future dental professionals and advancing the profession of dental assisting and dental hygiene. I appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony on behalf of PCC in opposition to the -A4 amendment to HB 3223. I acknowledge the nationwide shortage of dental assistants and the impact of dental assistant shortages in Oregon. However, lowering the standards related to written exams currently required for certification of dental assistants in Oregon is cause for concern.

Passing a national board exam is a milestone professional achievement in one's chosen profession. The Dental Assisting National Board (DANB) is recognized by the American Dental Association (ADA) as the national certification board for dental assistants. More than 36,000 dental assistants hold DANB certification, and each year, DANB issues nearly 50,000 certificates to those who pass its national and state exams. DANB certification is a tangible way to demonstrate that a dental assistant has met or exceeded the criteria established to measure baseline knowledge and national competency standards in the profession.

The Oregon Board of Dentistry has established Dental Assisting Rules through Division 42. Dental assistants are critical members of the dental team and the duties dental assistants perform require specialized knowledge. In order to perform advanced tasks, dental assistants in Oregon must first be certified in these procedures. The certification process is performed by the Dental Assisting National Board (DANB). These procedures include exposing dental x-rays, general expanded functions (EFDA), expanded orthodontic functions (EFODA), restorative functions, preventive functions (EFPDA), and certified anesthesia functions.

The amendments made to HB 3223 seek to expand opportunities for dental assistants to complete alternative written exams as part of the certification process. This ultimately lowers the standard for dental assistant certification and undermines the dental assisting profession. Notably, this bill diminishes dental assisting certifications in Oregon and dismantles the career ladder for advanced credentials, which allow dental assistants to practice at the top of the scope of practice in Oregon. Lowering the certification standard minimizes the value of the dental assistant's role in the practice and undercuts the profession. This may contribute to further workforce shortages of much needed dental assistants throughout the state.

As a leader in Career and Technical Education (CTE), PCC is committed to collaborating with industry partners and stakeholders to ensure qualified oral health professionals are prepared to enter the workforce. The critical shortage of oral health professionals, including dental assistants and dental hygienists, is multifaceted. In alignment with the Oregon Community College Association (OCCA), PCC supports convening an interim workgroup of stakeholders, including allied dental educators, the Oregon Dental Assistants Association (ODAA), the Oregon Dental Hygienists' Association (ODHA), and the Oregon Dental Association (ODA) to bring legislation to the 2024 Session that addresses barriers to dental career entry while maintaining high standards for education, certification, and patient safety.



I respectfully ask you to vote no on HB 3223 and the -A4 amendment to maintain current standards for dental assistants and ensure public safety.

Sincerely,

*Jessica August*

Jessica August, CDA, RDH, BSDH, MSDH  
Director, Dental Sciences