



May 17, 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 would like to start by thanking Senator Patterson for convening a meeting with multiple stakeholders to discuss HB 3223A. Collaboration is key to addressing dental workforce shortages throughout our state and increasing access to quality oral health care. I would also like to thank Representative Pham for meeting with Dean Janeen Hull and me in regard to HB 3223.

I appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony on behalf of PCC in opposition to the -A14 amendment to HB 3223. The proposed amendments seek to expand opportunities for dental assistants to complete alternative written exams as part of the certification process. I acknowledge the nationwide shortage of dental assistants and the impact of dental assistant shortages in Oregon. However, the language in HB 3223 - A14 reflects a misunderstanding of the importance of national board examinations. Lowering the standards related to written exams currently required for certification of dental assistants in Oregon is concerning. If alternative written exams are to be accepted for certification as a dental assistant, the exams need to be at the caliber of a national board examination.

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. National board examinations are also required for dentists and dental hygienists. The Joint Commission on National Dental Examinations (JCNDE) is the agency responsible for the development and administration of the National Board Dental Examinations (NBDE) as well as the National Board Dental Hygiene Examination (NBDHE). The rationale for having national board examinations is to protect public health through valid, reliable and fair assessments of knowledge, skills, and abilities to inform decisions that ensure safe and effective patient care by qualified oral healthcare team members.

The third party testing agencies highlighted above are recognized as the nation's leading resource for supporting standards of oral healthcare professionals. Furthermore, 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. DANB is committed to reducing barriers for current and aspiring dental assistants and increasing access for new generations.

PCC is committed to expanding the pipeline of qualified dental assistants and dental hygienists; promoting diversity, equity and inclusion; and providing dental assistants and dental hygienists with pathways for career progression. We can work together to increase the workforce of qualified oral health professionals while increasing access to care throughout the state. Unfortunately, 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. It is important to promote education and credentials to elevate the dental assisting profession and enhance public protection.



I respectfully ask you to vote no on HB 3223 and the -A14 amendment to maintain current standards for dental assistants and ensure public safety.

Sincerely,

Jessica August

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