



OREGON STATE LEGISLATURE

Wednesday, May 10th, 2023

Dear Chair Patterson, Vice-Chair Hayden, and Members of the Senate Health Care Committee,

We are writing today to share our support of [HB 3223A](#), with the [-A4 amendment](#), a bill that would address issues within the current dental assistant certification system and get more individuals to fill this much-needed role within dental offices.

As members of the Oregon Legislature's Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) Caucus, we are well aware of the inequities that exist in our healthcare system and how our workforce shortage has exacerbated such issues.

HB 3223A, with the -A4 amendment, aims to promote equity in the education and training of dental assistants by ensuring any written exams required for certification meet a set of criteria. This includes language accessibility and the development of alternative testing options. Currently, the Oregon Board of Dentistry requires dental assistant applicants to take a third-party written exam administered by the Dental Assisting National Board (DANB) prior to certification.

These exams have created unnecessary barriers, particularly for non-native English speakers. For example, the required DANB radiology exam is only available in English, which has raised concerns that requiring it may undermine efforts to promote equity and improve access to culturally appropriate care.

While DANB representatives have shared that they will eventually offer their tests in Spanish, this still would not address any of the 120+ languages other than Spanish and English that Oregonians speak at home.

It is critical that Oregon's certification requirements do not create unnecessary or discriminatory barriers for oral health professionals to begin or advance their careers. Requiring tests to be offered in at least the three most spoken languages in the state, is a step in the right direction to advancing a more inclusive and equitable certification and training system.

Oregon is experiencing a critical shortage of dental assistants. Without adequate staff, clinics are forced to cut back patient care hours, and patients go without the care they need, which can lead to unnecessary pain, interfere with their ability to work and go about their daily lives, and result in costly health complications down the line.

Communities of color have long experienced the greatest disparities, inequities, and barriers when it comes to healthcare, including oral healthcare.

Meanwhile, the Oregon Employment Department has identified dental assisting as one of the most challenging roles to fill of all vacant healthcare jobs. Data indicate approximately 10% of Oregon's 5,480 dental assistant positions are vacant — with twice as many open positions as new dental assistants joining the field.

HB 3223A received unanimous support in the House Behavioral Health & Health Care Committee and bipartisan support on the House floor.

The -A4 amendment alleviates concerns from stakeholders about the support for an exam by allowing written exams for dental assistant certification while balancing accessibility needs.

Another dental bill, [HB 2979A](#), would further address the workforce shortage by investing in education and training pathways for dental professionals. It also received unanimous support from the House Committee and is now under consideration in the Joint Committee on Ways & Means.

The Oregon State Legislature has a major opportunity to help close the gap in oral healthcare delivery and access this session. We must invest in education and workforce development while reducing barriers in the immediate term for Oregonians to join the field.

We thank the Committee for their time and consideration of this bill; please pass HB 3223A, with the -A4s, this session.

Sincerely,



Representative Hai Pham, DMD
House District 36



Senator James Manning Jr.
Senate District 7



Representative Nathan Sosa
House District 30



Representative Farrah Chaichi
House District 35



Senator Lew Frederick
Senate District 22



Representative Daniel Nguyen
House District 38



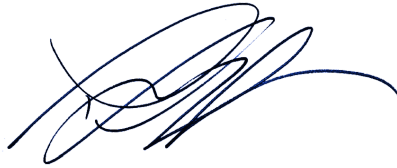
Representative Janelle Bynum
House District 39



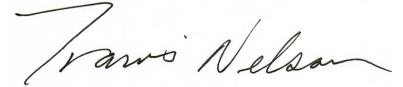
Senator Kayse Jama
Senate District 24



Representative Annessa Hartman
House District 40



Representative Tawna Sanchez
House District 43



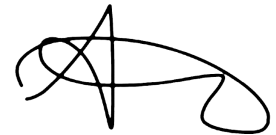
Representative Travis Nelson, RN
House District 44



Representative Thuy Tran
House District 45



Representative Khanh Pham
House District 46



Representative Andrea Valderrama,
House District 47



Representative Hoa Nguyen
House District 48



Representative Ricki Ruiz
House District 50