

**HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH CARE**  
**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF ENDING DISCRIMINATION**  
**AGAINST NATUROPATHIC PHYSICIANS**

**PRESENTED BY**  
**JENNIFER HICKS, ND**  
**ON BEHALF OF ZOOM+CARE**  
**June 7, 2017**  
**Chair Greenlick and Members of the Health Committee**

Chair Greenlick and Members of the Health Care Committee,

My name is Jennifer Hicks. I am a Naturopathic Physician, currently working for ZOOM+care in Portland and living in Beaverton, Oregon. I have been practicing medicine for twelve years and completed a two year residency in family practice medicine.

As you know, in the state of Oregon, NDs (Naturopathic Physicians) are trained as primary care physicians (PCPs) and licensed as independent practitioners. Just like other primary care providers, NDs perform physical exams, diagnose and treat illness, order and interpret labs and imaging, and make referrals as needed. In addition to providing standard of care for all primary care services, naturopathic physicians are trained to prioritize health education and disease prevention. There is a shortage of primary care providers in the state and we have the potential to help remedy this shortage.

With the current state of credentialing barriers, many primary care clinics cannot hire Naturopathic Physicians because it is not economically viable to do so. At ZOOM+care I provide urgent care and primary care services to patients. I enjoy my job. It provides great job satisfaction as I am part of a dedicated clinical team that provides Oregonians access to high quality primary care seven days a week.

Prior to working for ZOOM+care, I worked at Sherwood Family Medicine which is an integrative clinic in Sherwood, Oregon. I enjoyed my job there as well.

Even though my patients were very satisfied with the care I provided to them and my supervisors were pleased with my work, I was laid off due to poor insurance reimbursement for my services. All four NDs working at that clinic ultimately lost their jobs due to lack of adequate insurance reimbursement. Even though I am currently happily employed by ZOOM+care, I am concerned about my job security. The changes as proposed in HB 3400 would not only help protect the jobs of some Naturopathic Physicians including myself, but would also benefit Oregonians wishing to seek medical care from NDs.

Let me explain the discriminatory practices that a bill such as HB 3400 would help eliminate and how this would affect Oregon residents:

Currently, private insurance companies can create arbitrary standards for credentialing NDs as PCPs. Some of the insurers have created standards that are unattainable by most NDs, creating what really is a false expectation to patients that they can see an ND for their primary care. Specifically, these insurers may require a one to three year postgraduate residency in their credentialing criteria. At this time, there are few residency opportunities available to new graduates and the vast majority are of only one to two years duration.

Three year residencies are virtually unheard of. If an ND is not credentialed as a PCP, then they are usually classified as a specialist and there may be several different ways that a patient may suffer financially as a result:

- A patient who chooses to see a ND may be forced to pay a higher copay or coinsurance than they would pay if seeing a different type of provider for the same service.
- There may be no coverage by insurance if a patient sees an ND classified as a specialist without a referral from the patient's PCP.
- Preventative services such as wellness exams and vaccinations provided by NDs may be subject to deductible if the ND is classified as a Specialist. This deductible would be waived for these same services provided by PCP MDs, PAs or NPs.
- Other times, preventive services may not be covered at all if provided by a ND who can not be credentialed as a PCP.

These financial barriers can result in delays in vital health services for individual patients. Additionally, patients may not be aware of all the intricacies of their insurance plan coverage prior to making an appointment and seeing us for care.

At times, after the visit with us, the patient realizes they need to make another appointment with a provider with different credentials in order for the services to be covered by their insurance. This results in patient frustration, duplication of services, and unnecessary healthcare expenses.

House Bill 3400 would relieve these financial strains from patients that choose to see NDs who are credentialed as PCPs, and help to ensure that patients get timely care when they need it. House Bill 3400 would not only help with Oregon's primary care workforce shortages, but would also ensure Oregon residents are better able to access the medical care that is vital to their livelihood.

For all the patients who choose to see a Naturopathic Physician for their primary care, I thank you for your time today and your consideration of my testimony.

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