

Name: Vileka Fisher

Date: February 10, 2019

Subject: Oregon Association of Naturopathic Physicians Pay Parity Bill

Dear Senate and House Health Care Committees,

My name is Vileka Fisher, and I am a naturopathic medical student. I would like to share my experience as a student to show the importance of this profession in the delivery of quality healthcare in the state of Oregon, and the barriers that we face in trying to deliver this care.

Most of my teen years were spent battling chronic illness. I saw a variety of doctors and specialists, but I never got better. I did not expect to pursue a career in medicine—I planned on being a music teacher—but like many drawn to naturopathic medicine, as a patient, I experienced the pit-falls of the standard medical paradigm and felt deeply dissatisfied with my own care. Natural medicine and personalized nutrition, prescribed by a naturopathic doctor, were crucial for my own recovery. I resolved to share the healing power of natural medicine with everyone I know. Immediately after completing my bachelor's degree in health science, I started my medical school journey at the National University of Natural Medicine (NUNM).

Naturopathic medical school is every bit as rigorous as any other medical education. In addition to knowing everything an MD or DO must know to be an effective, excellent primary care provider—pharmaceuticals, current standards of care for every condition that might walk in the office, over-reading radiographic images, point of care ultrasound, laboratory diagnosis, preventive care, and screening exams—we must attain expert knowledge in nutrition, botanical medicine, physical medicine, mind-body medicine, IV therapy, and homeopathy. It is a lot to know, but I truly believe our comprehensive tool bag for helping people get better is the future of medicine.

The five years I am dedicating to completing my Doctor of Naturopathic Medicine, in addition to my prerequisite four year bachelor's degree, is a serious financial investment in myself and my community. I want to be a primary care physician. I want to serve rural areas and accept insurance—because most people have insurance and want to use it. But my ability to serve will be severely impinged if I cannot pay my bills. How will I be able to keep my clinic doors open if I cannot keep up with student loan payments, business, and living expenses? Just like any other primary care physician trying to pay off student loans while paying for business and living expenses, I hope to be able to bill my patients' insurance and be reimbursed.

However, in the state of Oregon, naturopathic doctors are only paid 60% of what MDs and DOs receive for providing the same screenings, exams, and procedures. I

would say NDs do even more, because we have approximately 160 hours of training in nutrition (compared to the 20 hours, at most, that MDs or DOs receive) and hundreds of hours of training in botanical medicine, physical medicine, mind-body medicine, IV therapy, and homeopathy. And we are still paid significantly less.

There is little incentive to take insurance and serve in areas where people rely on insurance (i.e. those with a lower socioeconomic status) when reimbursement rates are abysmal. Excellent, comprehensive naturopathic medical care that provides patients with a variety of treatment choices—conventional and complementary—should not be reserved for the “healthy wealthy.”

Statutory protections for insurance reimbursement for naturopathic physicians would help NDs reach more people while simultaneously increasing patient healthcare choices—because more NDs will be willing to take on insurance if they are guaranteed they will be reimbursed appropriately. I am asking that you vote yes on the Naturopathic Physician Pay Parity bill.

Sincerely,

Vileka Fisher

Naturopathic Medical Student, NUNM, Class of 2021