

Testimony to a Committee Hearing

Chair Monnes Anderson and Members of the Senate Health Care Committee,

For the record, my name is Amy Coplen (your name) and I reside in Hillsboro, Oregon. I am the Program Director (faculty member) at Pacific University School of Dental Hygiene Studies which is the training site for Dental Therapy Pilot Project 300. I am also a member of the Oregon Dental Hygienist Association.

I support senate bill 1549 because Dental therapists have the potential to address the access to dental care issues in the state of Oregon. Those who lack access to dental care tend to be from marginalized populations especially low-income individuals and people of color. So for me, this is more than just an access to care issue, it is a social justice issue. Affordable dental care is simply unattainable for most Oregonians. The childcare center where I take my children offers dental insurance, but very few of the workers can afford the premium and they choose to go without. As a dental professional I see the decay and disease in the mouths of the individuals caring for my children every time they smile at me when I pick up my kids. Something must be done. Dental care can no longer be a luxury attainable by only the most affluent individuals.

As a dental educator in a program that focuses on access to care for underserved populations, we are able to have a big impact on the community in our clinical fieldwork sites utilizing the expanded practice permit, but many individuals we see are well past the

need for preventive care, their mouths are full of disease. Many diseases that could be treated by a dental therapist. It is incredibly difficult to have to tell those individuals that the only help we can provide are referrals and contact information for a place that can only *potentially* treat their need.

With dental therapy, we have a chance bring care to people in desperate need. This healthcare delivery model has been used successfully in over 50 countries worldwide for over a century, and is already approved in 11 other states. Currently Oregon is only approved for dental pilot projects but this bill will allow anyone trained under these pilot projects to obtain a permanent license and continue to practice in their communities.

There is only one group that opposes this bill, the Oregon Dental Association. They will tell you that there are plenty of dentists in Oregon to meet the need, but after serving at Project Homeless in Washington County last weekend I talked to an individual with OHP that spent hours looking for a dentist who would treat her only come up with nothing. Her story is the norm. Dentists who accept OHP may only take a very small number of individuals and turn others away. When I have asked dentists if they take OHP, I get a very similar answer from most, "I lose money by treating OHP patients", or "I can't afford to see OHP patients". This bill allows for a dentist to employ a dental therapist. The salary of a dental therapist is lower than that of a dentist. This workforce model has the potential to allow dentists to treat more OHP patients and be fiscally responsible. The Oregon Dental Association may also express concern about the safety and quality of the care provided by a dental therapist and that we need more data from our pilot projects to

prove efficacy. The data already exists that dental therapists are an evidence-based way to provide safe quality dental care to communities in need.

In summary, I ask for you to support the Senate Bill 1549 on behalf of the oral health of all Oregonians.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony. Please feel free to contact me at amy.coplen@pacificu.edu (503) 352-7249.

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