



February 4, 2020

Dear Chair Monnes Anderson, Vice-Chair Linthicum and Members of the Senate Committee on Health Care,

OPCA is a non-profit organization, with a mission to support Oregon's 32 community health centers, also known as federally qualified health centers, in leading the transformation of primary care to achieve health equity for all. Community health centers deliver integrated primary, dental and behavioral health care services, to over 433,000 Oregonians annually. Community health centers are providers within the CCO networks, providing care to Oregon's underserved populations, including one in four Oregon Health Plan members.

We are writing to urge your support of SB 1549, which seeks to remove barriers and improve access to oral health care for underserved Oregonians.

Oregon's community health centers serve patients who often lack adequate access to dental care. Many of their patients suffer with untreated disease, and many more are at risk of disease, often because they don't have access to preventative dental health care and education. Providers and care teams see firsthand how barriers to care can lead to poor health outcomes and increased cost to the healthcare system. We know that individuals who don't receive regular oral health care are at greater risk for missing school, experiencing health complications related to oral health disease, and are less likely to maintain jobs and/or stable housing – all leading to downstream health and social complications.

OPCA and community health centers believe that access, education, and prevention are the ultimate keys to extending good oral health to those who don't have it. Access to oral health care is directly related to workforce as well as community factors such as poverty, geography, language and cultural barriers, and availability of childcare or transportation. Community health centers are working to address many of these factors including workforce.

SB 1549 is a critical step in tackling these factors we see in our communities across Oregon. It does this by creating the licensed profession of dental therapy. By increasing Oregon's dental workforce, we expand access to care where it is most out of reach: in rural, low-income, and communities of color.

This evidence-based health care delivery model has demonstrated that dental therapy works. We have not only seen improvement to access and outcomes here in Oregon as part of dental pilot project 100, but can also point to the successful implementation of authorized dental therapy in 11 other states.

We urge your support of this bill as an opportunity to be part of an upstream solution that both improves health outcomes and our communities.

Thank you,

Danielle Sobel, MPH, Policy Director
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