



February 20, 2020

The Honorable Andrea Salinas, House Committee on Health Care
900 Court St. NE
Salem OR 97301

RE: Support for SB 1550, Interim Therapeutic Restorations by Dental Hygienists

Dear Chair Salinas and members of the House Committee on Health Care,

For the record, my name is Dr. Cyrus Lee. I am a general dentist and the Dental Director, Care Delivery for Permanente Dental Associates, PC, which is the dental group exclusively contracted with Kaiser Foundation Health Plan of the NW. I am here on behalf of the Kaiser Permanente Dental Care Program, which has the privilege to provide dental care to nearly 300,000 Kaiser Dental members in Oregon and Southwest Washington.

Despite the best efforts of the Oregon Health Authority (OHA) and the state's Coordinated Care Organizations (CCOs), most low-income Oregonians are unable to take advantage of the traditional oral health care delivery system. Those of us who live and work in metro areas take for granted that we can access routine or emergency dental care. But 33 of Oregon's 36 counties are designated as dental "health professional shortage areas" ("HPSAs"). And as of 2016, two Oregon counties had no dentist at all.¹ This dental workforce shortage is exacerbated by the challenges many Oregon citizens face in even affording dental care when faced with other critical expenses. The result is that the most vulnerable Oregonians – children in low-income households – have one of the lowest rates of annual dental visits and one of the highest rates of oral health disease in the nation.

One way to promote affordable, accessible care is by expanding the scope-of-practice for registered dental hygienists to include more low-risk restorative procedures. In physical health, the advent of so-called "physician expanders" or mid-level providers – PAs and nurse-practitioners – has been essential to address the shortage of physicians relative to demand. In oral health, the emerging need for dentist expanders is no different.

SB 1550 is the end-result of a successful mid-level dental provider pilot approved by the OHA, which itself would not have been possible without this committee advancing SB 738 back in 2011. If passed, SB 1550 would permit dental hygienists to perform Interim Therapeutic Restorations, procedures that are currently limited to dentists. We believe this legislation will support additional innovations in oral telemedicine and, most importantly, we believe it will help move the needle on expanding access to dental care for Oregon kids with Medicaid coverage.

¹ Oregon Health Authority (2017), Oregon's dental workforce: Based on data collected during 2015 and 2016. Portland, Oregon: Oregon Health Authority.
https://www.oregon.gov/oha/HPA/ANALYTICS/HealthCareWorkforceReporting/1_Dental_Wkfc_2016.pdf

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We are asking this Committee to advance SB 1550, and to support expanding access to oral health care in 2020 and beyond.

Thank you for your consideration and I am happy to take any questions.