

Testimony in Support of House Bill 2528
March 3, 2021

Chair Prusak and Members of the House Committee on Health Care,

For the record, my name is Ariana Trevino and I reside in Beaverton, Oregon. I am a dental hygiene student and I attend a school that focuses on low-income populations that often lack dental insurance or may have several barriers to accessing regular dental care. I am writing in support of Senate Bill 2528 that would amend the Dental Practice Act to create a licensed dental therapist for Oregon.

As a student who is immersed in multiple rotations that have a common theme of helping communities gain access to dental care, I often see a lot of patients at high risk for caries and rampant decay among all ages. I truly believe introducing a dental therapist to the dental team in Oregon would benefit populations who may not be able to seek annual dental care. Currently, Oregon has a pilot project for dental therapy that is a 1 year program at Pacific University. However, the participants must be current registered dental hygienists who hold endorsements in local anesthesia and restorative functions. Often, people, even dental teams, lack a full understanding of the competency and education of a dental therapist. As it stands, registered dental hygienists in Oregon can currently perform 13 of the 22 dental therapy procedures. There is often rebuttals being made that dental hygienists are the mid-level providers and as much as dental hygienists can do, introducing a real mid-level provider to aid in the oral healthcare crisis would be beneficial to patients as well as healthcare providers. Dental therapy programs would be required to be CODA approved or be an educational program that is equivalent to CODA accreditation and has been approved by the OR Board of Dentistry. The pilot project taking place at Pacific University has rigorous requirements that their students must pass at a competent level, they have dentists mentoring the students and providing literal over the shoulder feedback. The Dental Therapy program at Pacific allows for the dental therapy students to work as a dental hygienist as they complete the program so their skills as a hygienist don't go unused. The biggest concern among the majority of the current testimonies is lack of education and training. I'd like to make it a point that the bill will allow dental therapists in Oregon to work and it lays down a framework for the scope of practice for a DT and requirements that must be met, however, specific programs can make their own changes. For example, in Pacific University's pilot program, their students were all registered dental hygienists who were allowed to practice local anesthesia and restorative services. This allowed the program to prioritize critical education and clinical requirements to be met instead of starting at the beginning to train their students. I fully support this bill as seeing rampant decay in children in America is heartbreaking and we have a solution right in front of us to combat this. One question I would like to ask everyone opposed to this bill is "What are YOU doing to help fight this silent epidemic of oral diseases among our underserved populations?" Dental therapy is the answer. It's worked in multiple other states where dental therapy is legal with a plethora of positive results ranging from more satisfied patients to less emergent dental visits and more preventative dental visits being recorded.