

March 4th, 2021

Re: Supporting HB 2528

Chair Prusak, Vice Chair Hayden, Vice Chair Salinas, and Members of the Committee,

Hello, my name is Marissa Gardner. I'm a Lower Umpqua native and member of the Confederated tribes of Coos, Lower Umpqua and Siuslaw Indians (CTCLUSI). Working as one of the two Dental Therapists for my tribal community, we have made significant progress in improving the oral health needs of our patients and are overall striving to help make a wholesome community.

Tooth decay is prevalent in the United States, especially among communities of color, low income communities, and rural communities. Many Oregonians have struggled with dental disease due to the lack of providers and support needed to improve their oral health conditions. The Covid-19 pandemic has worsened the decay rates in these communities by limiting access to care even more so. Dental Therapist can fill the gap of health care services and make a difference within these suffering communities.

There is evidence that the oral health workforce is not representative of AI/AN populations. A study published in the Journal of Public Health Dentistry found that only 0.2% of the 190,800 active dentists in the U.S. in 2012 were AI/AN. The study concludes that "among the number of strategies that policymakers, educators, health professions, advocates and the public are discussing as solutions to addressing the unacceptably high burden of dental disease in the AI/AN populations, improving the workforce diversity of dental providers is critical"*

As a Dental Therapist, I am urging you to support HB 2528 because I have seen first hand how it allows for Dental Therapist to improve access to care not only by improving the influx of patients within the clinic but also for those whom are unable to be seen within the clinic due to physical, emotional, or locational barriers. Dental Therapists are valuable in executing outreach programs that address many of these barriers such as home visits for our elders, new mothers, daycare screenings, and telehealth appointments. Much of these programs cannot be completed by a dentist because of the high demand of patients in the clinic. We as Dental Therapists are able to help manage this population's oral health needs safely, effectively and are financially feasible.

Dental Therapists receive training from the Alaska Dental Therapy Educational Program. The program was accredited by the American Dental Association's Commission on Dental Accreditation (CODA), the governing body that accredits all U.S. education programs for dentists and dental hygienists. This is a two year program that focuses on a limited scope of practice. By focusing on a smaller set of commonly needed procedures, dental therapists can be educated in a shorter time period and at a much lower cost than dentists. Dental Therapy offers

a tool for future economic stability to dental clinics by allowing more employers to hire highly skilled providers within their clinics.

Please support HB 2528 and expand dental care access in Oregon!

Sincerely,

Marissa Gardner, DHAT

** The American Indian and Alaska Native Dentist Workforce in the United States, Elizabeth Mertz, PhD, MA, Associate Professor UCSF School of Dentistry. The Journal of Public Health Dentistry, March 2017.*