

March 4, 2021

Chair Prusak and Members of the House Health Care Committee,

My name is Elizabeth Plessinger, and I reside in Vancouver, Washington. I am a Dental Hygiene Student in Oregon and have had the rare opportunity to provide care to many underserved populations in the Hillsboro area for the last two years. I have first hand seen the barriers these individuals go through including; lack of insurance or lack of offices willing to take OHP and Medicaid, transportation, cost of treatment, language and lack of culturally competent care. Due to reasons like this I am writing in support of Senate Bill 2528 that would amend the Dental Practice Act to allow a licensed dental therapist for Oregon.

As a dental hygiene student, I have been able to go on multiple rotations that are focused towards communities who do not have access to care. I have seen a six-year-old boy with such rampant decay that it has become irreversible pulpitis because he had no insurance, and no one to advocate for him. I have seen a fourteen-year-old girl with decay between every tooth and has never owned her own toothbrush before because of lack of dental insurance and oral health education. I have experienced a patient crying at her last appointment of SRP because she has never been able to afford dental treatment before and now will receive restorative treatment and her mouth "will finally not be in pain anymore". These individuals' stories could have been different if a dental therapist had been allowed to advocate for them in their area. I have spent months researching the impact that dental therapists have in states like Minnesota and Alaska, and the results speak for themselves! I urge members of the dental community to research what has been possible due to these new mid-level providers, and how many underserved communities have now been able to received treatment.

In addition, the pilot program for dental therapy at Pacific University is a great example of the training and education that a dental therapist receives. These students have been restorative dental hygienists for years, and hold endorsements for local anesthesia and nitrous oxide. This year long CODA approved program allows the participants to learn 9 new procedures and go through rigorous training to ensure that they are extremely competent when they are finished. These students have to pass competency's, process evaluations, and exams just like dental schools. While dentists mostly focus the last two years in clinic on countless procedures, dental therapists spend up to double that time on only a couple procedures. They are MORE THAN competent to provide care, and I don't know about you but that is exactly that type of care I would want, and what our underserved populations deserve.

For the members of the dental community who are against this bill, I am asking for you to become knowledgeable in the education that a dental therapist receives and the impact they have shown to have. If you still disagree after doing your research, I want to know what you are willing do for these members of our community. Are you willing to sit back and let more children and adults suffer, or are you willing to be apart of the answer that is right in front of us?