

Testimony in Support of House Bill 2528 March 19, 2021

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

For the record, my name is Wilber Ramirez-Rodriguez and I reside in Hillsboro Oregon. I am an expanded practice dental hygienist and I work as faculty in a dental hygiene program providing direct patient care to the underserved and the underinsured populations of Multnomah, Washington, Yamhill, Clark, and Polk Counties.

I am writing in support of Senate Bill 2528 that would amend the Dental Practice Act to create a licensed dental therapist for Oregon.

Access to Care

- This testimonial is on behalf of all my patients who do not have access to this form of testimonial.
- On a typical outreach clinic day of 8 patients, approximately 50 to 70 percent of these patients need follow-up care for simple fillings and extractions. Thanks to MTI and Virginia Garcia we are able to refer some of them for dental emergency needs but these same patients will not be seen for simple fillings and extractions. Since they have nowhere to go, these patients in early disease stages will need to wait years for their teeth to develop pain or infection, become an emergency, before they will be schedule by Virginia Garcia and MTI. It is not ethical to ignore the state of disease in people who do not have access to humanitarian service due to economy, distance, or other barriers.
- As a dental provider, I see one of the biggest barriers in the access to care in the United States is the cost of dental services. The community I serve does not have the economic resources to afford the high cost of dental treatments. The health provider should not choose a health career for personal, financial enrichment but instead, service to the community should be the main vocation. I see that dental treatments are either very expensive through private dental offices or free through one-day outreach events. But unfortunately, there are few to no clinics that offer routine or basic dental services for individuals of low socio-economic status. For this reason, we need in our society accessible programs for those who need them the most. By employing the services of dental therapists at a lower cost these basic dental services can be accessible for anyone.
- Dental therapists can help the dental team reach more people to receive access to dental care.
- Dental therapists will help close the gap to access of care in Oregon

Education

- Based on my experience of being in the first dental therapy pilot program (#300) and being previously trained as a dentist in Peru, I can assure you that the pilot program is a high-education program. To be accepted into the program, the applicant must have a current dental hygiene license, have their restorative endorsement, and have restorative hygiene experience in patient care. In my case, a bachelor's degree in dental hygiene with my restorative endorsement and 7 years of patient care experience in the United States. The education in this pilot program is very similar or equal to the education for a dentist. The textbooks and literature are the same as those used at the University of Oregon Health and Science University (OHSU). The number and hours of pre-professional practice exceed what is required of a dental student. The dental therapy student is much more careful with each aspect of patient care and documentation due to previous and concurrent experience as a health care provider.

- This bill will require dental therapists to have completed a dental therapy pilot project, a CODA accredited dental therapy education program, or a dental therapy education program that is equivalent to a CODA accredited program that has been approved by the Oregon Board of Dentistry.
- CODA accreditation standards require that dental therapy education programs include at least three academic years of full-time instruction or its equivalent at the college-level, which is one year longer than the CODA accreditation standard for dental hygiene education programs.

Quality of Care

- In the same way as any other health care program, an individual who applies for a dental therapy license and desires to practice Dental Therapy will be required to pass written, laboratory, or clinical exams to test their professional knowledge & skills.
- To practice as a dental therapist, the bill requires dental therapists to work under the supervision of a dentist per a very detailed practice agreement
- Dental therapists will only be allowed to do what their supervising dentist allows them to practice and in what the dental therapist's scope of practice is.
- The collaborating dentist will only delegate treatments to a dental therapist if the dentist feels comfortable with the skills and knowledge of the dental therapist in the protection of the patient health.

Evidence

Evidence shows that similar programs to Dental Pilot Project #300 in other states such as Minnesota have a great impact on access to dental care for patients with no access or little access to dental care.

Dental Pilot Project #300 will be a great fit for a dental team. This will greatly impact access to dental care for the underserved and uninsured community in Oregon.

In closing, I urge you to support House Bill 2528 because it will allow dentists to work with dental therapists to expand access to dental care in Oregon.

Thank you for considering this testimony.

Wilber Ramirez-Rodriguez EPDH