

May 10th, 2021

RE: Supporting HB 2528

Dear Chair Patterson, Vice Chair Knopp, and Members of the Committee,

Daii (hello), I am Naomi Petrie, a member of the Confederated Tribes of Coos, Lower Umpqua, and Siuslaw Indians (CTCLUSI). I live on my ancestral lands in Coos Bay, Oregon working for my tribe as a dental therapist. I am writing you to urge your support of HB 2528, licensing dental therapists in Oregon.

I grew up in my tribal community attending tribal gatherings, camps, and was even a patient at my tribe's dental clinic that I work in now. Like many Indian Health Service (IHS) clinics, our clinic was plagued with a high turnover rate of dental providers. I recall having been seen by various dentists in my time as a patient-- within a ten-year period, I saw 11 different dentists. As soon as I found out dental therapy would be a great opportunity for my tribe to help establish continuity of care, I knew what I wanted to become. In 2015 I left home to attend the Alaska Dental Therapy Education Program to pursue a life-long profession that intertwines my tribal heritage with providing a needed healthcare service in my home community. I came home to Coos Bay in 2017 and since then have been working as a dental therapist under the authority of Pilot Project #100. My hope is that this bill passes so that I may retire as a dental therapist in 40 years from the CTCLUSI dental clinic.

A patient's experiences as a kid effects their relationship with their own teeth and how they feel about receiving dental care as an adult. Historically, tribal people have suffered traumatic experiences that propagate a fear of the dental clinic that they unintentionally pass on to their children. I have heard this sad account by many of my elderly and adult patients. My training in Alaska had a heavy emphasis on providing dental care to young patients. This training has allowed me to build trusting relationships with our tribal youth. I am working in my community to alleviate some of that fear, starting with our tribal youth, so that my people can have healthier teeth and lives. If this bill passes, I will be able to continue building upon those relationships.

I am looking forward to providing basic and routine care to my patients outside of the pilot context. I am required to get written consent from each patient to see me, even if I have provided all of their care for the past 3 years. I have to interrupt restorations to take intraoral photos before, during and after. This is not ideal for the patient. The pilot project administrative burden has also limited the hours I get to spend with patients and the number of patients I see in a day. I believe that being out of the pilot project will allow our clinic to better serve our patients and improve appointment wait time.

I take pride in providing safe and proficient dental care for my dental patients taught to me by the Alaskan Dental Therapy Educational Program. If I didn't, it would show up in the weekly, quarterly, and yearly chart reviews and reports completed by different dentists and project staff as part of the pilot's extensive monitoring and evaluation efforts. My education, from the recently CODA accredited Alaska Dental Therapy Education Program, provided me with the skills and experience needed to deliver high quality care to members of my Tribe who have for so long had inconsistent care. They appreciate my understanding of our culture and history, and that makes me better able to understand their concerns, fears and successes in their health care.

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration of the evidence behind dental therapy and the experiences of those working in this profession. I hope you will support HB 2528 so I can continue this work as a licensed dental therapist in Oregon.

Luuwii (thank you),
Naomi Petrie, DHAT
CTCLUSI Dental Clinic