

Testimony in opposition of:

House Bill 441: An Act Relating to dental care providers; that directs the State Workforce and Talent Development Board to create and maintain dental assistant training modules available to the public free of cost.

Dear Senator Patterson and members of the Senate Committee on Health Care,

Submitted by *Concerned Healthcare Professionals of Oregon*. We are a coalition of concerned dental professionals who want to ensure a safe dental visit for all citizens of Oregon.

We recognize and appreciate that much of Bill 441 supports education of dental assistants including, *“The Higher Education Coordinating Commission shall award grants to community colleges in this state to support the development and marketing of, increased enrollment in and scholarships available for training programs for dental assistants and dental hygienists.”*

Our opposition is to Section 3,(2): *“The State Workforce and Talent Development Board shall create and maintain a dental assistant training module that is available to members of the public free of cost.”*

There is a dental assistant shortage occurring in states that have education, training and certification requirements for dental assistants as well as states that do not. Providing free training modules will not improve the dental assistant shortage but only lower the interest in joining the field, lower the quality of dental assistants, and decrease the quality of care provided to community members.

The Oregon Board of Dentistry, Dental Practice Act Division 42 Rules for Dental Assistants, currently provides pathways for dental assistants to be trained on-the-job through the support of the Dental Assisting National Board (DANB) and The DALE Foundation. Dentists can train their own dental assistants by following these pathways. High quality education modules have been developed by subject matter experts (SME's) and are reviewed, updated and maintained on a regular basis. These modules are already available at a low cost.

We support working with the state of Oregon, the Oregon Dental Association and others to improve dental assisting as a career by following the recommendations presented in a research study; *Dental Workforce Shortages: Data to Navigate Today's Labor Market*. This report contains comprehensive data and includes *Considerations for Dental Employers as We Look Into the Future, page 4. (inserted below)*

We believe the key to increasing the number of dental assistants in the state of Oregon is to encourage dental assisting as a career through recruitment programs in high schools and community colleges. This is where the tax payers' dollars will make the most difference and improve the interest in becoming a trained professional dental assistant.

We urge you to amend House Bill 441 to strike Section 3, which calls for the creation and maintenance of a dental assistant training module, and to strike Section 8 that calls for funding

the provisions of Section 3, so the citizens of Oregon can be assured their dental visits continue to be safe and care is being provided by professionals who have received the highest standard of education and training.

Respectfully submitted,

Concerned Healthcare Professionals of Oregon

CONSIDERATIONS FOR DENTAL EMPLOYERS AS WE LOOK TO THE FUTURE

Dental practices need to remain competitive as employers when it comes to employee benefits. Paid vacation and paid holidays are now the norm in dentistry. The majority of dental practice employees are also offered retirement savings options and paid sick time. However, in order to recruit and retain a robust workforce, dental employers need to offer health insurance and paid leave. Within dentistry, these benefits are much more common in public health and dental service organization (DSO) work settings.

Responsive compensation is a must. Wages need to be assessed annually. Ideally, raises should incorporate performance measurement, which may help dental team members feel more connected to practice goals and offer a sense of professional fulfillment.

Workplace culture cannot be overlooked. Among employees who are satisfied in their roles, positive workplace culture, work-life balance, and ability to patients are the most commonly cited contributing factors. Poor communication in dental practices is one of the top risks to retention. Traditional dental practices are small businesses that typically lack a dedicated human resources team to evaluate and improve upon these aspects of the work environment.

Consolidated dental practices have an edge when it comes to employee benefits. Dental service organizations and group practices are better positioned to offer employee benefits. However, there are lower levels of overall workplace satisfaction among dental assistants and dental hygienists working in these practices, likely driven by differences in other aspects of the workplace. This merits further research.

Shoring up the workforce pipeline will require long-term changes. The numbers of new dental hygienists and dental assistants graduating from allied education programs may not be enough to compensate the losses of team members who permanently left the profession during the pandemic. There may be another wave of retirements in the next few years that will put additional pressure on the workforce pipeline. Innovations are necessary to shore up the pipeline for long-term sustainability of the dental workforce.

Complete Study can be found at this link: <https://www.danb.org/news-blog/detail/news/new-research-explores-dental-workforce-shortages>