



RE: SB487

January 30, 2023

Dear Chair Patterson and Members of the Senate Health Committee:

I am writing in support of SB487, for the financial support for dental care coordination in association with Oregon Health Authority's school-based dental sealant projects.

As the Dental Health Coordinator for the Salem-Keizer School District since 2003, I have first-hand experience providing dental care coordination, and I can attest that school-based dental services play an essential role in combating dental disease in children. Oregon's school-based dental service model has gained national attention, and those of us spearheading and coordinating these efforts are proud to represent the state. Incorporating dental care coordination throughout the state is much needed and is a worthwhile investment.

A fully functional, successful program model of combatting childhood dental disease needs to include both 1) Prevention Services, and 2) Dental Care Coordination.

Barriers to care are common—oftentimes multi-layered and complex. The service population for the Oregon Health Authority's certified dental sealant program is low-income schools across the state; schools whose students are vastly Medicaid covered--or Medicaid eligible. Commonly known barriers to care include such things as parents' language barriers, lack of transportation, lack of childcare, inability to miss work for fear of job loss, mental health issues such as anxiety or depression. A less commonly known barrier to care is parents' not knowing which provider to call for appointments.

Access to care barriers can effectively be overcome or removed when dental care coordination is in place. Barriers to care result in unreceived care. Here is a common reality: Think of the child experiencing dental pain; unable to focus in class, unable to chew, waking from sleep. And the parent calling multiple clinics—having no success with scheduling an appointment for the child.

When coordinating dental care for Salem-Keizer students, I help parents overcome these obstacles. Medicaid's Dental Care Organizations (DCOs) are various; multiple DCOs existing within same communities. OHP enrolled Salem-Keizer students are assigned to one of three DCO plans: Advantage, Capitol Dental Care, or ODS. Knowing which DCO a child is on is a first step. Once I know the student's assigned DCO, I can sort out which clinics are accepting new patients on that plan, or to which provider the student is particularly assigned.

During this 2022-2023 school year, I have provided care coordination assistance for more than 100 Salem-Keizer students.

In partnership with Capitol Dental Care (during this school year):

- Over 8,000 students have participated in school-based dental screenings.
- Nearly 1,900 students have been identified with decay.
- 120 whose needs have been identified as urgent (pain, infection/abscesses).

Navigating dental care can be complicated. And frustrating. When there are too many barriers, care is essentially not accessible. Examples of when I provide care coordination includes when:

- Parents are unaware their children have dental coverage (thinking they only have medical coverage).
- Parents get turned down when calling clinics that are not affiliated with the correct dental plan, and/or are not the child's "assigned provider."
- Children's OHP coverage lapses without the parents' awareness.
- Siblings are assigned to differing dental care plans.
- Children's established providers discontinue accepting certain dental care plans.
- Parents need assistance with the OHP enrollment process.

Timely care coordination helps relieve children's pain and infection. It is also cost-effective. **Untimely** dental care results in costly surgeries. Care coordination is a cost-effective, successful means of ensuring dental care is available and utilized.

Please provide the financial support necessary for OHA's care coordination grant projects, and for the establishment of community dental health coordinator certification programs.

Sincerely,

*Jessica Dusek*

Dental Health Coordinator  
Salem-Keizer School District