

Testimony in opposition of:

Senate 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,

I am greatly concerned about the section of House Bill 2979 (SB 441) that asks for 2 million dollars to create teaching modules to facilitate dentists training dental assistants on the job.

I am fully aware of the shortage of dental assistants across the country, with Oregon being no exception. I do not discount the challenge that this poses for dentists and dental teams that are needing to hire. However, it is extremely important to me that the steps taken to correct this shortage are in the best interest of the public, the dental community and the dental assisting profession over the long term, and are not short-sighted solutions that actually perpetuate the problem.

I have been a clinical dental assistant for 41 years in the Eugene area. For the last 18 years, I have also been an educator in this field; however, I am not writing today representing my college, but as a dental professional concerned about a profession that I care deeply about. I have seen and been a part of 4 decades of changes to the dental assisting profession, from one of mostly on-the-job training, to a more professional field that has greater scope of practice, and thus career enhancement and advancement. With this has come more demand for dental assistants and respect for the profession, as well as some raise in pay (albeit slow). These are the factors that will attract and retain applicants to the field. (According to the study done by the American Dental Association on 2022, the #1 reason that dental assistants are leaving the field is insufficient pay, and the #4 reason is lack of opportunity for growth).

The Oregon Board of Dentistry continues to increase the allowable services Expanded Function Dental Assistants are able to provide. This has been done mostly in response to the need for access to care. While I am in favor of expanding the scope of practice for assistants, I also understand the need for oversight in their training to ensure the high quality of care and the safety of the public.

Comprehensive training is already available. The 9 accredited dental assisting programs

in Oregon are only 65% full. In addition, there are non-accredited online options offered both at Portland Community College, and through the DALE foundation (that affiliates with the Dental Assisting National Board). Both of these programs already provide the ability for someone to do their didactic training online, while getting hands-on experience in an office. Moreover, these educational opportunities are updated to stay current, and provide mechanisms to ensure understanding of the material and theories. They are very comprehensive and cover everything from HIPAA, OSHA, and infection control dealing with blood borne pathogens, to the procedures, instruments, dental materials and application processes. There truly is not a need to create something already in place.

The creation of a module such as is proposed, and the encouragement of on-the-job training for dental assistants will set the profession of dental assisting back decades, thus impacting pay and skill advancement, and perpetuating the shortage we are currently facing. In addition, it has the potential to affect patient safety.

The tax dollars requested for this section of SB 441 for the creation of a teaching module would be much better spent in finding ways to help future assistants access the options that are currently available.

As a long term assistant with a strong dedication to the dental field, I implore you to consider these points, and amend the bill to remove the creation of the teaching module in section 3.

Respectfully,

Leslie Greer

Member of the Concerned Healthcare Professionals of Oregon (CHPO)

