

Submitter: Laura Vanderwerf

On Behalf Of:

Committee: House Committee On Behavioral Health and Health Care

Measure: HB2996

I am a dental professional in Oregon, and I am writing to urge you to vote no on House Bill 2996. This bill, if passed, would forbid the Oregon Board of Dentistry from requiring dental assistants to pass a radiological proficiency exam before taking dental x-rays.

House Bill 2996 is not the solution and it puts dental professionals like me, and the patients I serve, at risk. I might find myself working in an office alongside assistants who are not properly trained, which could increase the chance of my exposure to ionizing radiation, which is associated with a risk of cell damage that can increase the chances of getting cancer.

Please vote no on HB 2996 because it:

- Increases risk to patient and provider, alike
- Waters down the quality of care received by patients
- Devalues the dental assisting profession
- Could worsen the workforce shortage

Proponents of the bill believe it will solve the dental assistant shortage, but there are dental assistant shortages in every state, including in those states where requirements for entry into the field are much less rigorous than Oregon's. Removing a necessary safety measure will not solve the dental assisting shortage, and it could make it worse.

Removing the exam requirement devalues the dental assisting profession, making it more likely that dental assistants will leave for another career. Studies show that professional credentials increase career commitment and job satisfaction. Eliminating professional requirements does the opposite, while putting patients and providers at risk.

An objective radiation safety exam is necessary to protect patients and workers. The current exam, DANB's Radiation Health and Safety (RHS) exam, is convenient and accessible, and the content is validated and regularly updated. If this bill passes, it will make Oregon the first state to prohibit use of an objective exam to assess whether dental assistants have the knowledge required to safely expose patients to ionizing radiation.

I strongly urge you to vote no on HB 2996.

I was trained on the job to become a dental assistant, yet was required to take and pass a radiology course before taking x-rays on a patient. Before becoming licensed as a dental hygienist, I was required to complete a radiology course and pass a board exam that contained questions related to radiology. The benefits of these courses not only allowed me to understand the process of taking x-rays, but how that radiation over time could be detrimental to patients and staff within a dental office.

If the goal is to increase the dental assisting workforce and if the belief is that the cost of taking a course and exam impedes people from becoming assistants, then perhaps instead of lowering the requirements to becoming a dental assistant, we should find ways to help those future dental assistants to afford taking courses that will assure safety for the public and those working in the field. Certifications and licensing change a job into a career...and something one can be proud of.

Thank you for your careful consideration of what is best for the health of Oregonians.

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