

Submitter: Tona Shelton

On Behalf Of:

Committee: House Committee On Behavioral Health and Health Care

Measure: HB2996

I am a trained dental assistant for over 31 years 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.

I have found dental assisting a very valuable career and I have never been without a job. What you may not know is that dental assistants are often, single women and single Moms. By devaluing this career option for women (there are some men), you also bring down the pay and benefits available to them. Did you know the person cutting your hair has to have a license but the person sitting next to the dentist can walk in off the street with zero training??? Something else that you may not know is that the same people who would be taking your x-ray are the same ones who are sterilizing the instruments that go into your mouth, and cleaning the spaces where you have dental work done. Do you want them trained, or are you okay with an untrained, poorly paid person doing a VERY mediocre job. Your health is in their hands!

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