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To: House Behavioral Health & Health Care Committee, Chair Rob Nosse and Members

RE: *HB 2555 [Naturopathic Physician Reimbursement]*

As a patient of an Oregon-licensed Naturopathic Doctor, I respectfully ask for your support of HB 2555, to compensate NDs at the same level as any other qualified provider. With the current and forecasted future shortages in the health care professions translating to delayed care for too many, we cannot continue as a state to disincentivize all competent professionals from remaining in the health sector or dropping insurance plans (a patient-access issue).

My own experience with traditional medicine as it relates to delays includes a recent fight to get an overdue colonoscopy scheduled with OHSU. Despite the urgent need to proceed, given that three close family members have experienced colon cancer, it took more than five months to even get an appointment scheduled once I was referred, and another month beyond that to actually have the procedure, which detected and removed two pre-cancerous growths. Had I not received the intervention of a legislator, I would not have had the call-back to schedule the appointment even at the five-month mark. Who knows what may have happened to me if not for a policymaker's help. We are in a profound workforce crisis; every hand on deck is needed. Access, via insurance coverage, is part of that equation.

Structuring reimbursements by type of provider fails the common-sense test. The only reason for such a structure I can see is a deliberate intent to discourage certain professionals in order to offer preference pay to others. I have watched, over my 30+ years as a legislative advocate, various health professions lobby to bar participation by others, often arguing patient safety but usually having the goal of limiting other legitimate approaches. If the State of Oregon agrees that naturopathic medicine is a valid health care profession, it should not, in effect, discriminate against those licensed professionals for performing the exact same procedures as traditional medical doctors and other health professionals. The pricing by insurers should be based on the procedure, not the practitioner. To do anything other than that is pennywise and pound foolish. Why?

Because the naturopathic physician devotes more time to patients than the typical medical doctor (11 minutes for the latter, according to my anecdotal research), educating patients, focusing on more wholistic prevention strategies (e.g., good nutrition, encouraging physical activity, managing stress, and addressing the quality of sleep). For an ND, it's not just about expensive pharmaceuticals or surgeries – which has often been the approaches my previous MDs exclusively relied on. From my perspective, there are roles for each type of provider to play in the health care realm, but NDs should never be penalized by unfair compensation levels.

Naturopathic doctors are paid about half of what all other provider types (MDs, DOs, NPs and PAs) are paid for the exact same codes and services. This imbalance puts my doctor on unstable financial ground and puts my access to the provider of my house in jeopardy. Naturopathic doctors are being forced to drop insurance plans just to remain financially viable. This recently happened to me, forcing me to change from my long-time naturopath to another provider. My only other option was to pay for ND services out of pocket in addition to paying for insurance premiums for MD care only.

On behalf of all Oregon patient-consumers, and for rational equity in health-care reimbursement, HB 2555 deserves to pass. It is not in the state's interest to allow this inequity to continue.