

2/1/23

Re: HB 2555, Vote YES to Support Fair Pay for NDs

Dear House Behavioral Health and Health Care Committee,

My name is Kristen Plunkett, I am a Naturopathic Physician practicing in Grants Pass, OR for over 15 years. I am writing to ask for your support on HB2555. It was very heartbreaking for us to find out that overall NDs receive 40-60% less than other provider types from Oregon Insurance companies for the same service. I was really struggling to pay my employees a living wage. I was working full time and weekends trying to keep up with the patient load I needed to see to keep my clinic running. I was having difficulty keeping employees when they could go to another health care office and receive a higher wage with more benefits. I had to make the difficult decision last year to go out of network with insurance, switching to a cash-based practice. Since that time, I can now pay my employees better (including insurance and 401k) and I am not working myself to death. The sad part is that many of my patients that are lower income, on subsidized insurance plans, could no longer afford to see the provider they wanted. It broke my heart to have to tell my patients going through cancer therapies at the time that I could no longer help them through their most terrible time because I was going out of network with their insurance.

Naturopathic Doctors are now graduating with over \$300,000 in debt, there is no way for them to pay off this debt when insurance companies pay us half of other providers, including physician assistants that only go to school for 2 years after their undergrad degrees. Naturopathic Doctors have graduated from an accredited 4 yr medical school and pass standardized board exams to get their license to practice medicine in Oregon. We have a full scope of practice to provide primary care.

I love providing primary care medicine to my patients and helping them learn how to live healthier lifestyles and eat healthier diets. I have helped many patients get off expensive pharmaceuticals and have better energy, mood, and health overall. Most of my patients prefer to treat the cause of disease instead of just taking a pill for the symptoms for the rest of their lives. They deserve the right to see the provider of their choice, but at this point low insurance reimbursements are prohibiting this.

At a time where we are really focusing on equality, NDs are being designated as “lesser than” by insurance companies and they are getting away with paying us less, not due to quality of care but because they can.

I also am a board member for the Rural Health Coordinating Counsel, part of the Office of Rural Health in Oregon. Our goal is to help rural communities have access to health care. We spend millions of dollars trying to incentivize doctors to practice in rural areas. By passing this bill, you will allow more rural health clinics to employ NDs to help provide care in these areas. At this

point, many small clinics cannot afford to employ NDs due to insurance companies paying us less.

We are here - licensed primary care doctors, working hard to serve our patients and communities. Please helps us to survive and continue to do so by finally passing HB 2555.

Thank you so much for your service to our communities,

Kristen Plunkett, ND
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