

Re: HB 2555, Support ND Fair Reimbursements

Dear House Behavioral Health and Health Care Committee,

I am a naturopathic medical student training in a four-year, post-baccalaureate accredited medical program as a primary care physician with a focus on preventative services and chronic disease management. **Naturopathic medical schools, like NUNM, are accredited by an agency recognized by the U.S. Department of Education, the same body that accredits schools like OHSU.** These programs require students to fulfill a minimum of 1,200 hours of clinical training and preceptorship before graduating with a Doctor of Naturopathy degree. To practice naturopathic medicine, naturopathic doctors (NDs) must pass a professional competency exam, meet annual continuing education requirements, and uphold standards as required by licensing agencies such as the Oregon Board of Naturopathic Medicine.

Many of my clinical hours take place at the NUNM Clinic which is recognized as a Tier 4 Patient-Centered Primary Care Home (PCPCH) and participates in the Vaccine for Children (VFC) program. My clinical training includes comprehensive primary care education. This equips us to help the Oregon primary care workforce shortage.

Yet, even as I work tirelessly to accomplish this great undertaking of becoming a licensed physician, I am increasingly wary of the reality of practicing in Oregon as a primary care provider. **There is a massive disparity in insurance reimbursement rates between NDs and all other primary care provider types, and my awareness of that fact causes me to question my future path.** The student loan burden for most students is massive – up to \$250,000 for some.

Fortunately, there is hope on the horizon with HB 2555! This bill addresses this unfair disparity by requiring insurers to pay us the same amount, for the same service provided, that it pays MDs, DOs, NPs and PAs. If this bill is passed, it will not only help me survive as a doctor but have a positive effect on patients and the healthcare system at large. HB 2555 will help to increase patient access to care in rural and underserved communities, protect patient choice of provider, and sustain 1,200 doctors already trained and licensed as part of the state's workforce, during this time of epic provider shortage.

As a naturopathic medical student, I am learning every day how to improve the health of my patients and help them avoid chronic disease. **Our emphasis on patient education and prevention and the unique set of skills we leave school with, equip us remarkably well to reduce healthcare cost and the burden on the system.** The patients we are seeing in the teaching clinic already reflect to me how valued our approach is and how important it is to continue to bring it forth into Oregon communities. It's for all these reasons that I ask you to please vote yes on HB 2555 and make my professional dream a reality.

Sincerely,

Neels Howard NUNM student