



April 19, 2023

Dear Senator Patterson and Members of the Senate Committee on Health Care,

My name is Jessica August and I am the Director of Dental Sciences at Portland Community College (PCC). I appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony on behalf of PCC in opposition to HB 2996 and HB 3223. I acknowledge the nationwide shortage of dental assistants and the impact of dental assistant shortages in Oregon. However, eliminating written exams currently required for certification of dental assistants in Oregon will lower the standards. Written exams play an important role in maintaining safety and high standards required for quality patient care.

Dental assistants are valuable members of the dental team and their work is integral to the overall health of patients. The duties performed by dental assistants require specialized knowledge and training. Dental assistants provide patient care and chairside support as dentists complete exams and often complex clinical procedures. In addition, dental assistants expose dental x-rays and perform critical infection control duties.

Written examinations required of health care providers serve as a lever for ensuring that practicing health professionals meet specific standards and continue to maintain competence in a given content area. For dental assistants, the written examination is offered by a third-party testing agency. The Dental Assisting National Board (DANB) is developed by content experts and represents the minimum national standards for knowledge, understanding, and patient safety expected in the dental assisting profession. Additionally, DANB exams are recognized or required in many states.

Removing written exams as proposed in HB 2996 and HB 3223 will do following:

- Put patients and providers health and safety at risk
- Lower the quality of patient care
- Devalue the dental assisting profession
- Lead to higher turnover rates and even greater workforce shortages of qualified providers

As the legislature continues to look for ways to address barriers to entry into dental careers, I would like to acknowledge the work related to HB 2979 and thank Representative Pham for introducing the amendment where stakeholders were able to find a compromise that works to expand access to dental training and careers without lowering standards. I hope we can work collaboratively toward a similar compromise on these bills.

I respectfully ask you to vote no on HB 2996 and 3223 to maintain current standards for dental assistants and keep the public safe.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jessica August".

Jessica August, CDA, RDH, BSDH, MSDH  
Director, Dental Sciences