

**To:** [Senate Health Care Committee](#)

**Measure:** [HB 2996A](#)

**Position:** Support

**Wednesday, April 19th, 2023**

Honorable Members of the Senate Health Care Committee,

Thank you for allowing me to share my testimony today. My name is Allen Cheng. I am an oral and maxillofacial surgeon, head and neck cancer surgeon, and microvascular facial reconstructive surgeon. I am the medical director of Head and Neck Oncology at Legacy Good Samaritan Cancer Center and practice in Portland, Oregon but treat patients from across the state, northern California, southern Washington, Idaho, Hawaii, and occasionally Alaska.

I am writing to share my strong support of HB 2996A as the incoming President of the Oregon Society of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgeons.

Healthcare is in a crisis. Across the country we are facing workforce shortages at all levels from assistants to physicians. This workforce shortage has hit dentistry extremely hard, particularly dental assisting and dental hygiene. This has resulted in severe barriers in access to care. I see this in my capacity as an oral and maxillofacial surgeon responsible for treating all head and neck trauma and infections at Legacy Emanuel, one of our state's two Level I trauma centers.

Our hospitals are completely full and not a day goes by where I am draining an infection that could've been treated earlier in a dental office, but now adding another body in the hospital.

HB 2996 is aimed directly at addressing one of the major barriers to credentialing trained dental assistants, the dental assistant radiology written examination.

One of the criticisms of HB 2996 is that taking radiographs poses a risk to patients for developing thyroid cancers and this written test safeguards patients from this unacceptable risk. I would like to address these concerns now in my capacity as a head and neck cancer surgeon, one who treats thyroid cancers.

Thyroid cancer, although not uncommon, is still relatively rare.

There are two known risk factors for thyroid cancer, radiation exposure and inherited mutations. The vast majority of thyroid cancers, like most cancers, occur without known risk factors. The risk of thyroid cancer is often stratified into very low, low, and high risk. Notice that I did not say low, medium, high. That is because most exposures remain very low risk.

High risk refers to therapeutic radiation, that is radiation given to treat other cancers. In terms of absorbed dose, that is in the realm of 60,000-70,000 microSV. Low risk is exposure to nuclear fallout. That's right, living near Chernobyl is still considered in the "low" risk category. Very low risk exposure is where diagnostic radiology falls into.

The lowest known absorbed dose that has been shown to be connected with a thyroid cancer in someone younger than 18 years old was 40,000 microSV.

To put that number in perspective, dental x-rays operate in the range of 1-100 microSV. To simplify things, you would be getting more radiation from a cross Atlantic Flight than you would when you get a full set of x-rays on your initial dental visit. New cone beam computed tomography units produce even less, 40-50 microSV.

Compared to the 40,000 microSV that I mentioned before as the lowest described exposure to be connected to a thyroid cancer, the radiographic study with the highest effective dose, the CBCT is about 40 microSV. It would require 1,000 CBCT to reach the lowest known dose of radiation exposure to cause thyroid cancer in a child.

Radiology is clearly safe. Dental radiology is extremely safe. What is also clear is that with dental radiography, the primary determinant of radiation exposure isn't the skill with which a dental assistant obtains the radiograph, but the decision-making behind what image to obtain and how frequently to obtain it. That responsibility has always rested with the doctor.

However, to argue that a non-validated written test for aspiring dental assistants is what protects patients from high risk of exposures and malignancy is hyperbole of the highest order.

Thank you, and I hope you will support HB 2996A this session.

**Dr. Allen Cheng, MD, DDS, FACS**