

TESTIMONY TO THE SENATE HEALTH CARE COMMITTEE

April 19, 2023

Chair Patterson, Vice-Chair Hayden, and Members of the Senate Health Care Committee,

For the records, I am Dr. Manu Chaudhry and I am a licensed Oregon dentist and serve as President with Capitol Dental Care. As a dental health professional, I am writing with an urgent message to ask you to support the two dental assistant workforce bills - **HB 2996A & HB 3223A** - and urge you to pass both these bills out of the committee.

Providing access to dental care is of critical importance to Capitol Dental Care in our efforts to provide care to Oregon Health Plan members. We are struggling to find sufficient dental assistants to ensure that we can accommodate a full schedule of patients and provide care to the maximum number of children and adults in need of care. We simply need more people ready to provide the critical work our assistants do in our offices every day. And we believe we should be examining and removing any potential barrier to individuals entering the workforce.

The Oregon Legislature has an opportunity to address this key issue this session. Rep. Hai Pham and Rep. Cyrus Javadi, both dentists, have brought forward two bills that will reduce barriers for individuals seeking to enter the dental assistant field by removing the costly third-party written tests required for certification. We do not believe that these tests are a true indicator of competency within this important area and we share concerns with other professionals that these tests create additional barriers especially for non-native English speakers. Additionally, not all states recognize or require these exams for certification.

The bills outline that these written exams would be replaced with hands-on clinical training and other alternative pathways, which provide better assessments of clinical proficiency, while also ensuring patient safety. (It should be noted that while the requirement for these exams will be removed, dental assistants will still have a requirement to receive certification from the Oregon Board of Dentistry.)

Dentists are ultimately liable for the health and safety in their offices. In Oregon, dental assistants are currently not performing irreversible procedures and are always operating under the supervision of a dentist. Since they are operating under the supervision of a dentist, the dentist is able to determine competency for their dental assistants. HB 3223 accomplishes this and includes sideboards that are spelled out in statute and will be further defined by the Board of Dentistry. Some states already do this, and allow the dentist to determine dental assisting competency for expanded functions as well. We believe this legislation will allow dental assistants to practice to the full extent of their skills and experience.

Capitol Dental Care respectfully requests your support of HB 2996A & HB 3223A. These bills provide one solution to addressing our dental assistant workforce shortage. We appreciate the work of Dr. Pham and Dr. Javadi for their work on this important issue.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Manu Chaudhry".

Manu Chaudhry, MS, DDS | President