

February 13, 2025

Senate Health Care Committee

RE: TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 597

Chair Patterson, Vice Chair Hayden and members of the Committee,

I hope this letter finds you well. My name is Dr. Manu Chaudhry, and I am writing to you in my professional capacity as President of Capitol Dental Care (CDC), a Dental Care Organization (DCO) that provides dental services to Oregon Health Plan (OHP) beneficiaries through contracts with Coordinated Care Organizations (CCOs) across the state since mid-90s. I am reaching out today to urge your support for Senate Bill 597 (SB 597), which would provide essential care coordination funding for the success of School-Based Dental Sealant Programs.

Capitol Dental operates one of the largest and longest-standing School-Based Dental Sealant Programs in Oregon, serving 140-150 schools annually for over 14 years. During this time, we have expanded access to more than 175,000 Oregonian children – and have prevented dental disease.

As you may be aware, dental decay remains one of the most prevalent chronic diseases among children, particularly in low-income communities. Research has consistently shown that school-based programs are among the most effective methods for preventing cavities and promoting long-term oral health. Dental sealants, which are applied to the chewing surfaces of children's teeth, create a barrier that significantly reduces the risk of tooth decay—by up to 80%—particularly in vulnerable populations.

However, for these programs to realize their full potential, strong care coordination is essential. This includes ensuring that children receive comprehensive care, follow-up services, and referrals for additional dental treatment when needed. Care coordination also fosters stronger partnerships with local health providers and helps ensure that students receive the ongoing health and social health care necessary for long-term health.

Unfortunately, many school-based dental programs face challenges due to underfunding and limited administrative capacity for effective coordination. This is where your support of SB 597 is crucial. By advocating for continued and increased funding for these programs, you can help ensure that more children—especially those in underserved communities—receive the preventive and follow up dental care they need to grow, heal, and thrive.

Thank you for considering this important issue. Your leadership and support can make a lasting difference in the health and well-being of Oregon's children. I am happy to discuss this matter further or provide any additional information you may need.

Sincerely,
Dr. Manu Chaudhry
President, Capitol Dental Care (CDC)