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Senate Committee on Healthcare - 2025 Oregon Legislation Session

My name is Alynn Vienot Hayes, and I am an expanded practice dental hygienist and the Director of Dental Program Operations at Neighborhood Health Center (NHC). I am submitting this written testimony in support of SB 597. NHC is a Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC) that provides comprehensive primary, behavioral, pharmacy, and oral health care to approximately 23,000 Oregonians across Washington and Clackamas Counties. As of 2023, 61% of our patients live at or below 100% of the Federal Poverty Guideline.

NHC Community Dental Program, served 4,347 children from Sept 2023 to June 2024. Referral and case management was provided for 264 children with urgent and emergent dental needs. Due to the hours, it can take to connect children and families to care and our limited resources, we limit case management to children with the greatest urgency for care; however, over 1000 other children had non-urgent dental issues, many of whom would benefit from care coordination to establish care at a clinic to receive the restorative care needed. Unfortunately, our program too commonly sees children with untreated dental problems that were previously noted in a screening earlier in the year or the prior school year. During the above mentioned period NHC's Community Dental Program also hosted 156 screening events serving a total of 53 sites placing 5,925 sealants and 3,746 fluoride treatments across Washington and Clackamas Counties.

If passed, SB 597 would direct the Oregon Health Authority (OHA) to establish a grant program to provide financial support to certified dental sealant programs and promote and engage in oral health care coordination activities.

Many children who receive oral health assessments and dental sealants through OHA-certified programs require follow-up dental care. Oral health care coordination activities can help these children to receive the follow-up dental care that they need from dental providers in their community. Care coordination reduces barriers to care, increases access particularly for underserved children and improves overall health outcomes. This grant program will help create a seamless connection between school oral health care, coordinated oral health care and private dental care, contributing to a strengthening of the overall health care system.

Although the \$900,000 appropriation may sound like a lot of money it is less than the cost of one child being treated in an emergency room for an abscessed tooth that has spread infection to other parts of the body. Oral health care coordination can help keep children out of the emergency room by connecting them to a dental home in their community.

NHC urges you to move SB 597 to the Senate with a do pass recommendation.

Sincerely,

Alynn Vienot Hayes, EDPH, MPH
Director of Dental Program Operations