

Testimony of Alayna Eagle Shield

Mitákuyepi, Alayna Eagle Shield emáćiyapi. Iyúha čhaŋté wašté nape čhiyúzapi. Wazíyaŋ ektá Lakóóta makóóče kiŋ Íŋyaŋ woslál haŋ akíčhita háŋska emátahaŋ. Lakóóliyapi Wahópi wówaši ečhámuŋ. Anpétu kiŋ lé líla iyómakiphi wahí kšto. Wópila táŋka.

(Relatives, my name is Alayna Eagle Shield. I shake each one of your hands with a heartfelt hand shake. I come from the Long Soldier District of the Standing Rock Nation in the Land of the Lakotas. I work at the Lakota language immersion nest. I'm very happy to be here. Thank you!)

Chairman Lee and members of the Committee, thank you for allowing me to testify.

Lack of access to dental care is an everyday reality for me as a Native American youth living in rural North Dakota. In our tribal communities, we stand in line before the sun comes up on Monday mornings for a chance to see a dentist, and even then there are no guarantees.

Offentimes, with sporadic care, our children grow up with pain, missing teeth, and when we think of the dentist we only think of our teeth being pulled. Rural communities in our state also struggle with the same lack of dental care providers and the problem is only getting worse.

It is wrong to say there is not a shortage of dentists in North Dakota. Thirty percent of counties in North Dakota do not have a dental provider at all¹. There are currently 13,379 Native American youth in North Dakota living in dental shortage areas according to the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA)². This is not acceptable for me and my Native American peers.

Dental therapists are a viable and safe option to end the inequitable standard of health care in Native American and rural communities. They are the most studied dental professional in the world and the data shows they provide the same quality of care as dentists in over 54 countries³. They take the same classes as dental students take and use the same books. Dental therapy training is shorter because they have a small, focused scope of practice allowing them to provide safe and routine care as part of a dentist-led team⁴. That last part is important because some claim that dentists will be left out. Just like other members of a dental team, dental therapists are supervised by a dentist. In Alaska, 27 dental therapists have increased access to over 40,000 people⁵. I hope North Dakota can duplicate the success in Alaska by allowing dental therapists to provide dental care to its residents.

Opponents to dental therapists often say that "prevention through education is key to breaking this cycle of generational dental disease⁶." It is hurtful to know that certain members of the medical community suggest we are uneducated and blame the victims for not being able to access the dental care provider we so desperately need but does not exist. We want to be a

¹ North Dakota Center for Rural Health. *North Dakota Oral Health Report: Needs and Proposed Models, 2014*.

² The Center for Native American Youth at the Aspen Institute.

³ Nash DA, et al. *A review of the global literature on dental therapists*. Community Dent Oral Epidemiol 2014; 42: 1–10. © 2013 John Wiley & Sons A/S. Published by John Wiley & Sons Ltd

⁴ Nash DA, et al. *A review of the global literature on dental therapists*. The W.K. Kellogg Foundation. 2012.

⁵ Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium. 2014.

<http://www.anthctoday.org/news/2014-05-27%20DHAT%20advisory%20FINAL%20Alaska.pdf>

⁶ North Dakota Dental Association. 2014.

<http://www.inforum.com/content/letter-mid-level-provider-option-not-same-dentistry>

healthy people and dental therapists can help make this happen by providing care that actually treats active disease.

I do appreciate the two events since 2011 in which dentists have volunteered to serve Native American children, but infrequent charity care is not the same as regular routine care. And it is important to note that the events have served children, but there is also a great need by adults and the elderly. Dental therapists come from the communities in which they serve. They are a local solution to a local problem.

By allowing the creation of dental therapists in North Dakota, Native American youth and all people in our state can benefit. I hope all people in North Dakota can finally get the dental treatment we deserve and can have smiles we can be proud of. Thank you.