



Jamestown S'Klallam Tribe



February 1, 2017

Dear Legislator:

The sovereign Tribes of Washington State have the right and responsibility to provide the best health care for our people. We are writing to you today to ask that you stand with us in fully recognizing those rights and support SB5079 and HB1414, Concerning Dental Health Services in Tribal Settings.

There is an oral health crisis in Indian Country, and it doesn't have to be this way. The Tribal Dental Health Aide Therapy (DHAT) program is one solution to the oral health crisis that will:

- optimize the oral health care system by improving the patient experience of care;
- increase and improve access and quality outcomes;
- increase the number of native oral health providers and;
- reduce the cost of care.

This bill is a tribal-led solution that adopts an evidence-based, culturally – competent care model with over a decade of demonstrated oral health quality outcomes in Tribal communities. The DHAT program is also economically efficient for Indian health programs because it increases access and lowers costs, while maintaining the same quality of care as that provided by a dentist. **Even though tribes do not need this bill in order to move forward with integrating DHATs into our dental programs, we do need state authorization in order to use our Indian Health Service funding once DHATs are practicing. This is particularly important for tribes with fewer resources.**

SB5079 and HB1414 do not require a tribal health program to adopt dental therapists but merely clears the way for tribes to choose to incorporate this provider into our oral health team if that is what the community and tribal leaders decide. It is a complement, rather than a replacement to other tools and resources available to tribal dental programs.

We respectfully urge you to support SB5079/HB1414.

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