



OREGON OPTOMETRIC PHYSICIANS ASSOCIATION

STATEMENT BY JANET BAKER, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, OREGON OPTOMETRIC PHYSICIANS ASSOCIATION
IN SUPPORT OF HB 2751

OREGON HOUSE HEALTH CARE COMMITTEE – MARCH 13, 2017

Chair Greenlick and members of the Health Care Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak in support of HB 2751.

My name is Janet Baker and I serve as Executive Director for The Oregon Optometric Physicians Association (or OOPA) which represents 800 Optometric Physicians, students, educators and eye health industry professionals in Oregon. They, along with their thousands of optometric staff operate in every county across Oregon, providing more than 2/3 of primary eye care to children and families across the state. Many times Optometric Physicians are the only eye health professionals in rural areas throughout Oregon.

As primary health care providers, Doctors of Optometry have extensive and ongoing training to examine, diagnose, treat and manage ocular disorders, diseases, injuries and systemic diseases that manifest in the eye, in addition to serving the vision needs of their patients. These comprehensive eye exams often prevent, or at least early diagnose eye and potentially life threatening conditions. For instance, in 2014, more than 250,000 cases of diabetes were first diagnosed by Optometric Physicians – and then referred to medical doctors for important co-management of diabetes related eye conditions such as diabetic retinopathy, glaucoma, and other conditions.

Optometric Physicians attain their undergraduate degrees, most often in a science field such as biology, chemistry, etc. They then go through the very competitive process of applying for graduate school at an accredited College of Optometry. Most Optometric Physicians practicing in Oregon graduated from Pacific University College of Optometry in Forest Grove. Upon graduation from Optometry school, many continue to further their studies in residencies in private practice, the VA, rural health, etc.

By the time they graduate from Optometry School, these young Optometric Physicians have incurred often more than \$250,000 in student debt. If they plan to open their own private practice, they also incur equipment and potentially mortgage debt for additional \$250,000 or more in order to be able to provide the critically important eye health and vision care they have devoted 8-10 years obtaining the license to provide.

Just like medical doctors, Occupational Therapists and others, these doctors, too, need the opportunity to participate along with their other health care colleagues in the loan repayment program in order to provide the 2/3 of primary eye health and vision care throughout Oregon.

In closing, the Oregon Optometric Physicians Association supports HB 2751 with the request that Optometric Physicians are allowed to participate in the program along with their other health care colleagues. Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak to you today.

Respectfully submitted,

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