



OREGON OPTOMETRIC PHYSICIANS ASSOCIATION

March 27, 2012

TO: HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

FROM: OREGON OPTOMETRIC PHYSICIANS ASSOCIATION

RE: HB 3000 TESTIMONY

The Oregon Optometric Physicians Association's applauds your willingness to consider the issues faced by many children who struggle in school because of undiagnosed vision problems. Our children cannot succeed in the educational environment if they come into the classroom without all of the necessary reading readiness skills. Unfortunately, many children in Oregon fail to thrive in our schools as a result of undiagnosed vision problems. Through passage of HB 3000, you will significantly advance our state toward the goal of ensuring that every student is able to take full advantage of the excellent teachers and programs offered in schools throughout Oregon.

The Oregon Optometric Physicians Association believes that children need a comprehensive eye examination before they enter the school system to ensure that they are ready to learn. With its current language, HB 3000 would accomplish this goal by requiring either a comprehensive eye examination or a vision screening upon entering the Oregon school system. HB 3000 would also create a mechanism for the schools to track children who have not completed this requirement or who have failed a screening and need to be referred for a comprehensive examination.

In addition to the valuable benefit to our children, a preventive vision examination program would result in long term savings of state funds expended for special needs students and those requiring special education services. A recent study of special education in New Jersey concluded: "Children with reading difficulties who do not receive intervention services are much more likely to be classified as requiring special education than students with reading difficulties who receive intervention services." The Commission found that early eye examinations with intervention could save the State of New Jersey as much as \$200 million in special education funding.

Here's what the research tells us about children's vision and learning:

- 80 percent of all learning during a child's first 12 years comes through vision.
- 25 percent of school-age children have vision problems.

- 60 percent of students identified as problem learners have undetected vision problems. *Zaba, JN, Vision's Relationship to Delinquency, Illiteracy and Learning Problems, 2001.*
- 70 percent of juvenile offenders have undiagnosed vision problems. *Zaba JN, Johnson RA, Reynolds WT. Vision Examinations for All Children Entering Public School — The New Kentucky Law. Optometry, March 2003.*
- Comprehensive examinations diagnose vision problems and eye diseases early, reducing the risk of vision and learning problems, and in some cases, blindness. *Roberts J., Eye Examination Findings Among Children, United States. Vital and Health Statistics, Series 11, No. 115, DHEW Publication (HSM) 72-1057.*
- Archives of Ophthalmology, 2008, published the Convergence Insufficiency Treatment Trial Study. Defined, "Convergence Insufficiency is a common binocular vision disorder that is often associated with a variety of symptoms, including eyestrain, headaches, blurred vision, diplopia, sleepiness, difficulty concentrating, movement of print while reading and loss of comprehension after short periods of reading or performing close activities" The principal investigator stated "There are no visible signs of this condition; it can only be detected and diagnosed during an eye examination."

Optometric physicians are on the front lines of eye health and vision care in nearly every community in the state of Oregon. In combination with our ophthalmology colleagues, there are a sufficient number of providers to deliver comprehensive eye examinations to the estimated 47,000 children entering the Oregon school system in a given year. By the year 2014, nearly all of Oregon's children will have insurance coverage for eye examinations. With the availability of providers, the necessary insurance coverage, and the option of opting out, we do not view this legislation as a burden to the citizens of Oregon.

The OOPA has been involved in the development children's vision legislation since the interim session work group formed in 2009 under the leadership of Representatives Gene Whisnant and Tina Kotek. We have witnessed the incredible amount of time and effort that they have given to this legislation over the years. This session, Representative Jennifer Williamson has also made a large contribution of time and energy. We would like to express our appreciation to Speaker Kotek, Representative Whisnant, Representative Williamson, and countless others who have participated in crafting children's vision legislation over the years.

Again, thank you for allowing us to speak to this extremely important issue. *The Oregon Optometric Physicians Association is committed to supporting legislation to truly improve children's vision in Oregon. HB 3000 would be a large step in the right direction. We respectfully urge the House Education Committee to support HB 3000 as amended.*