

Chair Prusak, Vice Chairs Salinas and Hayden, and members of the House Healthcare Committee,

I am writing to voice my strong opposition to HB 2541, a bill which would vastly expand the permissible surgical scope for optometrists in Oregon.

HB2541 would grant optometrists surgical rights to perform laser surgery inside of the eye for glaucoma and after-cataract surgery membranes, as well as manage glaucoma independent of oversight by an ophthalmologist. To ensure patient safety and to maintain public confidence in our medical system, I strongly oppose this bill.

Optometrists lack the training required. A fundamental tenant in medicine is that a practitioner should not be permitted to perform treatment if they do not have the training to recognize and manage the complications of their treatment. Ophthalmologists have at least an additional four to five years of demanding training designed to hone the skills required for surgical and laser treatment of patients as well as management and decision making.

This bill would threaten patient safety. The stringent educational and testing requirements for ophthalmologists are designed to ensure that the practitioner has the knowledge and experience to care for them safely. Optometrists do not have the requisite educational training or experience to safely perform surgery. This measure, if enacted, would not only threaten the vision of patients, it also would devalue medical training and education, and could ultimately undermine public confidence in the medical profession as a whole.

HB2541 will not increase access to eye care, and in my region and surrounding counties there is not currently a shortage of care. In Deschutes, Jefferson, Crook, Lake, Harney, and Grant County there is currently a ratio of approximately 1 ophthalmologist to 17,000 people. This is currently 5-6 percent better than the national average.

Current law requires that persons performing ophthalmic surgery are licensed to practice medicine by the Oregon Medical Board. HB 2541 places that same degree of responsibility and authority in the hands of the Oregon Board of Optometry. The membership of the Oregon Board of Optometry does not include medical doctors or surgeons. Yet HB 2541 would give the Optometry Board, composed of four optometrists and one public member, authority to make decisions regarding necessary education and training.

It is critical that legislators understand that surgical expertise cannot be obtained in the current optometric curricula or in an "add on" training course. There are no shortcuts for learning how to safely perform surgery. Surgical expertise including the expertise necessary in managing serious complications is only achieved through years of medical school, a surgical residency, and clinical training. HB 2541 provides or requires none of this.

HB 2541 is a bad bill and will, if passed, result in serious steps backward for patient safety and outcomes. Please vote "NO" on HB 2541.

Sincerely
Laith Kadasi, MD