

To: House Committee on Health Care

I am writing you today in opposition to House Bill 2541, a bill that would allow Optometrists to perform some surgical procedures and treat complicated glaucoma patients without consultation with an Ophthalmologist.

It is very disturbing to me that optometrists and their Board feel that they can decide that they are qualified to perform any surgical procedure without the training that is truly required to be able to safely take care of patients and their vision. Optometrists training is in primary eye care, learning to examine eyes, prescribe contact lenses and glasses, and to learn to recognize basic eye diseases. They are not trained, as medical doctors are, to appreciate the nuances of complex medical conditions, nor do they receive any training in the use of lasers or surgery. Ophthalmologists are, as you know, M.D.s, having gone to medical school for four years, followed by an internship and then at least three years of specialized residency training learning all facets of eye care, including pharmacologic, laser, and surgical treatments for a full range of eye diseases. Our training is then often enhanced with additional subspecialty training in the various subcategories of eye diseases requiring more advanced medical and surgical treatments. There simply is no comparison in the amount of training that we receive relative to what even the best optometrists receive. Optometrists are not trained, nor can they be by simply attending a course, in the use of lasers, let alone perform surgical procedures of any kind.

The notion that they want to legislate their ability beyond their training is frightening to me. There are no "do-overs" when it comes to eyes. The idea of optometrists wanting to do surgery or use lasers is as absurd as, for example, your internal medicine doctor deciding to do heart surgery. Sure, your internist may have seen some heart surgery during medical school, but that does not make them qualified. Even foreign medical graduates, full residency trained surgeons from outside the United States, are required to repeat surgical residency training here in order to take our Board exams to be allowed to practice their specialty here. Why would we allow completely non-surgically trained optometrists to decide that they are now somehow competent to do surgery? A lot of education goes into surgical training; not just the technical aspects, but the "big picture" understanding of when surgery is the best option for the patient's benefit; when to do surgery, and when Not to do surgery. Recognizing and treating complications is a delicate part of patient care, and requires many hours of training in a surgical environment to appreciate the nuances involved. Optometrists are not surgeons, and should not be allowed to enter this level of eye care; it is a matter of patient safety.

Patients are confused enough about the different types of eye doctors and our different roles, as well as our different levels of training and abilities to treat their eye conditions. Allowing any expansion of practice to include laser or surgical treatments will blur the distinction even further, and make it difficult for patients to know who to seek care from and who they can trust with their vision. Many of my patients tell me that they would rather lose any other sense than the sense of sight; something that most of us hold dearly. I fear that patients will receive substandard care if this bill is allowed to pass, and that many patients will be harmed by unqualified eye care providers.

I urge you to vote against HB 2541 for the protection of your constituents and the citizens of our state.

Sincerely,

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