

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

I wanted to express my sincere concern regarding HB2541, a bill that I believe would greatly increase possible harm to our patients.

When I heard that the bill included a provision to allow optometrists to perform laser procedures, it immediately brought to mind a patient of mine who was referred by an experienced optometrist for a YAG capsulotomy. While this patient did have what appeared to be mild opacification by the posterior lens, which is usually the reason this procedure is performed, on careful exam and with knowledge drawn from my surgical experience, I could tell that a YAG capsulotomy laser had already been performed before. Fortunately, I did not repeat the laser procedure. In fact, if the referring provider had gone ahead and performed this laser procedure, the patient's lens would have been damaged and he would have needed a far more complex surgery to fix this mistake.

Optometrists are my friends and colleagues, and they are critical to the eye care team. But allowing optometrists to perform lasers and surgery without having gone through the surgical training of medical school and ophthalmology residency would be irresponsible. Part of being a good physician is understanding the limits of one's own knowledge and knowing when more expertise is needed. Even after 3 years of general ophthalmology residency, 1 year of cornea fellowship, and thousands of surgeries later, there are many ophthalmic procedures from other subspecialties that I would not venture to perform on my own due to my lack of training in those areas. As such, it is difficult to imagine that an optometrist who has been trained for general and non-surgical eye care would feel comfortable with intra-ocular procedures and surgeries. Furthermore, ask yourself if you would feel comfortable having your laser eye procedure or those of your family members performed by someone who was not a medical physician and surgeon? I would not be.

Sincerely,
Amy Tong, M.D.