

Submitter: J R

On Behalf Of:

Committee: House Committee On Behavioral Health and Health Care

Measure: HB4010

I recently became aware of a program Oregon has to provide student loan repayment incentives for health care providers in rural areas. This is commendable and a great way to bring quality health care providers to areas that have been historically neglected.

However I learned that optometrists are not included in that and would like to bring that to your attention if you aren't aware of it. Recently I had to travel ~2 hours each way to receive eye care for an issue that impacted my quality of life and safety. I am fortunate in that I could afford to take the time off work and the costs associated with the travel on multiple occasions to get the care I needed, but I know there are many that don't have that luxury. Including optometrists in the incentive program could help bring more eye care options to rural areas. The area I live in is also one of many rural areas in Oregon that also attract a large number of tourists and medical emergencies, even things as simple as someone losing contacts and needing more, strain our already limited resources.

There is a misconception among the general population about what optometrists can do and just how important they are. It is much more than just getting a prescription for glasses. Optometrists also provide medical care and treat many diseases from glaucoma to diabetic retinopathy and are often the first to detect things like a retina detachment that will cause blindness without prompt care. There are many diseases that have early distinctive symptoms that are detectable in the eyes and may have otherwise been overlooked until they have advanced enough for a primary care doctor to catch the disease. Even some cancers are first detectable in the eyes despite the growth being elsewhere in the body. As I'm sure you know, prevention and early detection are the two best and most cost effective ways to ensure a healthy and long life. Eye care is of the utmost importance even from a young age as there is a prevalence of young children being misdiagnosed as ADHD when the real problem is vision related. (Decarlo, Dawn K., et al. "ADHD and Vision Problems in the National Survey of Children's Health." *Optometry and Vision Science*, vol. 93, no. 5, 2016, pp. 459–465., doi:10.1097/oxp.0000000000000823.)

There is a shortage of quality optometrists in Oregon's rural communities and including eye care professionals in the loan repayment incentive program would go a long way to help bring this much needed resource to our communities.

Thank you for your time and I hope you consider including optometry in the incentive

program that has already proven successful in bringing quality healthcare to rural areas.