



House Finance Committee

Opponent Testimony-State Vision & Hearing Professionals Board-Sec. 4725.03

Substitute House Bill 49(Smith)-Operating Budget

April 27, 2017

Chairman Smith, Vice Chairman Ryan, Ranking Minority Member Cera and members of the House Finance Committee, my name is John Bruening and I am President of Geauga Vision Group. The Geauga Vision Group consists of 8 retail optical offices, employing a staff of 42 people, 16 of whom are licensed opticians. Two of our offices are located in hospitals, where we were invited to open dispensaries to bring affordable eyecare to the underserved of that community. I am also a dual licensed optician in Ohio and a board member of the Opticians Association of Ohio. I am here to testify in opposition to the provision in Substitute Bill 49 that abolishes the Ohio Optical Dispensers Board (OODB) and transfers the regulation and licensure of opticians to a newly created State Vision Professionals Board.

Opticians are licensed health professionals who fit eyeglasses and dispense contact lenses using prescriptions written by ophthalmologists and optometrists. They interpret prescriptions, educate the patient on the use and care of the product and adhere to safe practice standards. Opticians are independent practitioners who practice in a variety of settings. Some opticians own their own retail optical businesses. Other opticians work for ophthalmologists or optometrists in their offices and some are employed by large retail optical chains such as LensCrafters, Pearle Vision or Target Optical Brands. Opticians also work for managed care companies that have their own optical dispensaries. An optician can hold a spectacle license, contact lens license or have dual licensure in Ohio.

The Optical Dispensers Board currently regulates over 5,000 opticians and apprentices in Ohio. Substitute HB 49 proposes to abolish the Optical Dispensers Board as well as the Board of Optometry and combine the regulation and licensure of opticians and optometrists into a new Vision Professionals Board. Under the substitute bill, the new Vision Board would be comprised of 3 optometrists, 2 opticians and 2 public members. For several reasons, we oppose abolishing these self-sustaining Boards in favor of a new Board that is unbalanced and could have a negative impact on the delivery of optical care in Ohio.

The current Optical Dispensers Board receives input from its ophthalmologist and optometrist board members, its public members and its 5 opticians to regulate opticians and safeguard the public. The Board is efficient, operates solely from optician licensure fees and apprentice registration fees and has

not experienced inefficiencies or problems to date. To have a Vision Board with majority professional representation by optometrists, who have 50% fewer licensees than opticians in Ohio, and without input from ophthalmologists, could actually result in creating an anti-competitive practice and business environment. Asking optometrists to regulate the opticians who interpret their eye wear prescriptions or who may choose to practice in settings that compete with private optometry practices could end up stifling competition through practice regulation. The potential conflicts are many with no correlating benefit to safeguarding the public as boards are charged by law to do.

We struggle to find any value in abolishing the Optical Dispensers Board and creating a new Vision Board structure that may result in more inefficiencies, more conflicts, less competition and less public protection than is currently provided by the OODB and the State Board of Optometry. We respectfully request that you delete the bill's provisions creating the Vision Professionals Board and restore the current OODB.

While we vigorously oppose the Vision Board in its entirety, should it remain in the bill, we ask that the optician representation be increased to 3 opticians, 2 of whom must hold a dual spectacle/contact lens license and that you also add an ophthalmologist to the Board. This would at least give opticians equal representation to optometry and ensure that an ophthalmologist can weigh in on regulatory practice issues.

Thank you for your consideration and I will be happy to answer any questions you may have.