

House Bill 156
Proponent Testimony of Dr. Beckie Brown
President, Ohio Optometric Association
September 13, 2017

Chairman Brinkman and members of the Ohio House Insurance Committee, my name is Dr. Beckie Brown and I am an optometrist and owner of Essential Vision Care in Salem, Ohio. I am a graduate of the Southern College of Optometry in Memphis, Tennessee and John Carroll University in Cleveland. I currently serve as the president of the Ohio Optometric Association. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of House Bill 156.

HB 156 is an important bill that will help preserve patient choice in vision services and products, maintain the doctor-patient relationship and protect small business optometric practices. This legislation addresses several disturbing tactics in vision insurance that are limiting my patients' treatment options.

For example, many insurance contracts now dictate that certain designated vision care material suppliers or manufacturers be utilized for the purchase of vision products. Many times, these mandated suppliers produce products that do not meet the quality standards my patients deserve. Additionally, these suppliers are sometimes not as timely in producing eyewear, which can lead to a delay in patient treatment. These tactics remove treatment decisions from the hands of patients and their eye doctors. HB 156 also includes provisions to promote greater transparency for patients in purchase of eyewear and other related products. It will require both insurers and providers to notify patients of any business interest the provider or insurer has with a supplier of materials prior to a patient making a purchasing decision.

Additionally, HB 156 will help protect our small business optometric practices in Ohio. The vast majority of vision care is provided in small business settings, which help drive local economies through the purchasing of supplies and the payment of taxes and salaries. Optometric practices also have a significant impact on Ohio's state economy. There are approximately 2,000 optometrists practicing in Ohio, and statistics show that just over 4 team members work with each optometrist. Collectively, around 10,000 Ohioans work directly in optometric offices. However, our practices experience high overhead costs and unfair tactics, such as those addressed in this bill, which make it difficult for practices to remain viable.

HB 156 will help protect our small businesses by ensuring that our optical dispensaries can compete in the marketplace with other retailers who are not subject to insurance restrictions that place artificial limitations on fees charged for products and procedures that are not reimbursable under insurance plans. This practice is commonly referred to as "non-covered services." By eliminating insurers' ability to set these artificial fee restrictions for products and services that are not covered under a benefit plan, HB 156 will enable more competition in the marketplace, helping to keep costs low and allowing patients to do business with the provider they trust rather than seeking products from other retailers who do not have these similar limitations, some of whom are located outside the state.

The simple, targeted reforms in HB 156 will help preserve my patients' choice in health care decisions and protect small business vision service providers in Ohio. For these reasons, I urge your support for House Bill 156. Thank you again for the opportunity to testify in support of House Bill 156. I would be happy to answer any questions.