



Opponent Testimony - House Bill 476
House Transportation and Public Safety Committee
Keith Kerns, Executive Director
The Ohio Optometric Association
November 28, 2018

Chairman Green, Vice Chairman Patton, Ranking Member Sheehy and the members of the committee, my name is Keith Kerns and I am the Executive Director of the Ohio Optometric Association (OOA). The OOA is the statewide organization for Ohio's Doctors of Optometry and we represent nearly 70% of the licensed practitioners in the state. I am here today to testify in opposition to House Bill 476 in its current form.

Let me first say that I and our entire OOA membership certainly understand the close, personal commitment that Representative Koehler has to organ donation and share his desire to see as much done as possible in Ohio to promote this incredible cause. Being Ohio's primary eye doctors, our members are always supportive of any measures that can help your constituents restore or improve their sight. Organ donations provide miracles to recipients and families and we should invest as much effort as we can in making those miracles come true.

The OOA's opposition to HB 476 in its current form is due the fact that we and a coalition of other groups strongly believe that the positive and sometimes life-saving work that has been done through the Save Our Sight (SOS) program could be placed in jeopardy if HB 476 is enacted. By infringing on the current donation mechanism that has been long-established to fund SOS, this worthwhile program could very well see a draining of critical financial resources if other programs are allowed to seek additional funding in this manner. The SOS program, which does not receive federal funding, is too important to take this chance. The OOA believes there potentially are better ways to achieve the objectives of HB 476.

House Bill 476 would mandate the registrar of Motor Vehicles and each Deputy Registrar to ask each person renewing a motor vehicle registration if that person wants to make a voluntary contribution to the Second Chance Trust Fund, thereby expanding the fund's reach from the "donation ask" as part of driver's license renewals. Currently, the Ohio Department of Health's Save Our Sight Fund is the only "donation ask" during the vehicle registration process. Save Our Sight funds several important service delivery programs related to eye health and safety for Ohio's school-age children. One of those is the Realeyes classroom education program, which was created by the OOA and is administered by the OOA in conjunction with the Department of Health. Save Our Sight support is the only funding the program receives and it is a true public-private partnership that works.

Realeyes is comprised of four standardized, interactive, age-appropriate curricula that are presented by volunteer optometrists in classrooms settings. Topics covered include eye anatomy, eye safety and eye disorders. Each day an average of 615 Ohio school children receive a 45 minute Realeyes education program, taught in-person, by a volunteer eye doctor. That's 25 classrooms per day and 4,600 over the course of a year. In fact, over 1.1 million Ohio students have participated in a Realeyes program since 2001. Realeyes is presented in all 88 counties annually thanks to the generosity of the eye doctors and



other vision care professionals who collectively donate over 3,100 hours of time each year to make the program a success.

All Realeyes curriculums are evaluated by teachers, and student's learning has been measured effectively by extensive pre and post program testing. Programs also meet state teaching standards in anatomy and eye care. Additionally, the Realeyes program works closely with school nurses and has provided over 10,000 emergency eye kits for their use.

Realeyes is nationally recognized within vision care and in 2016, it was named Outstanding Project by the American Public Health Association's Vision Section.

We are concerned that were HB 476 to pass in its current form, Save Our Sight programs, including Realeyes would lack the ability to deliver the same results. Our concern is based on the belief that asking a person who is renewing a motor vehicle registration an 'either/or' question will result in significantly fewer contributions to the Save Our Sight Fund and that rather than choosing between the Save Our Sight Fund and the Second Chance Trust Fund, more people will choose neither.

To be clear, the OOA is not opposed to the Second Chance Trust Fund as it serves an important function in educating the public on organ donation. We believe it should continue to receive funds from the Department of Motor Vehicles through the renewal of an Ohio driver's license or state I.D. But if the Second Chance Trust Fund does not have adequate resources to accomplish its goals, or if it seeks to do more in the future and is searching for the financial backing to meet those objectives, I respectfully suggest that the committee and proponents look to find revenue sources which do not have the potential to negatively impact other successful public-private partnerships like the Realeyes program and the other Save Our Sight endeavors.

I think we can all agree that the work that the Second Chance Trust Fund does is important and should it require additional resources, the state should explore options to fund these efforts, including through the utilization of general revenue funds, if possible. We simply ask that these revenue sources don't jeopardize programs that work well as a result. We stand ready to work with the committee and the proponents to try to accomplish this goal.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on HB 476 today and for the opportunity to share with the committee some information on the Realeyes program of which we are so proud. I would be happy to try and answer any questions.