



Senate Finance Health & Medicaid Subcommittee

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

Substitute House Bill 49(Smith)-Operating Budget

May 17, 2017

Chairman Hackett, Vice Chairwoman Tavares and members of the Senate Finance Health & Medicaid Subcommittee, 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, sell eye wear, 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 many opticians are employed by large retail optical chains such as LensCrafters, Pearle Vision or Target Optical Brands. 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 State Board of Optometry and combine the regulation and licensure of opticians and optometrists into a new Vision Professionals Board. Under the House passed version of the bill, the new Vision Board would be comprised of 4 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 does not receive GRF funds. 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 same opticians who interpret and dispense their eye wear prescriptions, who sell optical products in competition with optometrists and who often practice in settings that compete with private optometry practices will 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.

Opticians are not alone in opposing a Vision Board controlled by optometrists who would be interpreting the scope of practice of opticians. Luxottica Retail, which operates 90 retail optical stores in Ohio, including LensCrafters, Sears Optical, Pearle Vision and Target Optical, issued a letter opposing the creation of the Vision Board as it will result in reducing competition and limiting consumer choice, especially in the underserved areas where I practice. Their letter states in part, ***“By eliminating the Optical Dispensers Board and consolidating its functions under the Vision Board under the control of optometrists, this legislation will vest Optometry with unilateral regulatory authority over the supply and activities of licensed opticians, and provide de-facto control over the business of independent opticians and optical companies...this will reduce public access to quality eye care, limit the supply of licensed opticians, increase compliance requirements for optical retailers, and limit competition in the marketplace for optical goods and services. ”***

We struggle to find any value in abolishing the Optical Dispensers Board and creating a new Vision Board structure that will 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. I am concerned with my ability to keep my businesses and maintain 42 staff persons as I will now be relying on competitors to interpret how I practice. I view the Vision Board as the beginning of killing optician jobs in this state. We respectfully request that you delete the bill’s provisions creating the Vision Professionals Board and restore the current Ohio Optical Dispensers Board with appropriate spending authority.

While we vigorously oppose the Vision Board in its entirety, should it remain in the bill, we ask that the optician representation be increased by 2 opticians, resulting in 4 opticians on the Board to balance the 4 optometrists. This would at least give opticians equal representation to optometry to minimize potential anti-competitive practice interpretations and regulation.

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