House Bill 33
Written Testimony of Keith R. Kerns, Esq.
Executive Director, Ohio Optometric Association
Interested Party
March 22, 2023

Chair Carruthers, Ranking Member Liston and members of the House Finance Subcommittee on Health and Human Services, thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony on behalf of the Ohio Optometric Association (OOA) which represents nearly 70% of the state's doctors of optometry.

The OOA respectfully requests support from this subcommittee and the House on two important items. We are seeking an increase of an additional 10% in Medicaid reimbursement rates on top of the 5% currently contained in House Bill 33 (a total increase of 15%) as well as a modest investment of $2.5 million over the biennium to expand statewide the extremely successful iSee (In-School Eye Exam) program that the legislature funded in the last budget to provide comprehensive vision care to children in Ohio's Appalachian areas through the State Treasurer's ResultsOhio program.

The OOA and its members have a long history of working to improve access to comprehensive eye care for all Ohioans. Our member optometrists have delivered thousands of free eye exams and glasses to children in need of vision correction through the iSee program operated by our charitable foundation. Additionally, we have a public-private partnership with the Ohio Department of Health through its Save Our Sight Fund in which volunteer optometrists educate 100,000 Ohio school children each year on the importance of eye health and eye safety. This program, known as Realeyes, has been in operation for over 20 years and was the recipient of the American Public Health Association Vision Care Section's award for Outstanding Scientific Project and American Optometric Association's Apollo Award, which honors persons or organizations for distinguished service to the visual welfare of the public. Finally, the OOA operates what we believe is the only optometric student loan repayment program in the country, which assists new graduates with outstanding school debt in exchange for practicing in underserved areas, providing pro bono services, volunteering in the community and other criteria.

Even with all of these successful programs, access to vision care remains a concern in our state. The most important key for improvement is a strong Medicaid program. Ohio's optometrists participate in the Medicaid program at a high rate – between 60-70% accept Medicaid patients. However, rates have not been adjusted since 2015. The OOA strongly supports Governor DeWine's proposal to increase Medicaid reimbursement, including a five percent increase for vision services, but the OOA believes more can and should be done in this very important area.

Primary eye care and vision services are paramount to assisting Medicaid recipients maintain meaningful employment and for providing pediatric recipients with the best opportunity to succeed in school. These services are especially vital to Ohio's at-risk populations. There is a strong connection between eye health and chronic health issues, including diabetes, hypertension and others. Ensuring that Medicaid recipients can obtain primary vision care services through community-based providers like optometrists, is an important component in treating and managing chronic health concerns. It can also reduce the chances of patients requiring institutionalized care or visiting costlier settings like hospital emergency rooms for treatment. Additionally, increasing access to comprehensive vision care can help the state accomplish its goal to increase literacy rates.

As such, the OOA respectfully requests the subcommittee consider increasing Medicaid reimbursement further than that proposed in the as-introduced budget, up to a 15% increase. This targeted and relatively modest investment can create a healthy and productive workforce for the future. It would be the intention of our association to work collaboratively with the Department of Medicaid to use this reimbursement increase to target vision services codes aimed at children while also increasing access to services for adult Ohioans as well.

Children's vision issues require special attention. It is estimated that 25% of school-aged children have a vision problem that may impact their ability to learn. However, only 15% of children have had a comprehensive eye examination by the time they enter kindergarten. Furthermore, the school vision screenings required by Ohio state law lack the necessary test components to completely evaluate a child's visual skills. In fact, these screenings may miss 60 to 75% of children who have vision conditions such as binocular vision disorders or visual perceptual delays. The false sense of security provided by "passing" a vision screening lowers the sense of urgency for obtaining a comprehensive eye examination. Of the children who fail the school-administered vision screening, less than 30% receive necessary follow-up care. The low rate of follow-up care has been attributed to several factors including economic distress, lack of understanding about eye care, logistical barriers, inflexible work schedules, and unavailability of appointments.

Recognizing that Ohio's school districts have great diversity in geography, population, socioeconomic status, level of need, and other demographics, the OOA and its charitable foundation recently partnered with the Foundation for Appalachian Ohio and Vision To Learn to bring mobile vision care to the Appalachian region of the state. The mobile clinic is staffed by OOA member optometrists and licensed opticians and supported by the talented administrative team from Vision To Learn. This unique project was aided by the previous General Assembly with an allocation to the State Treasurer's ResultsOhio program designated for the program if it met certain pay-for-success metrics. We are pleased to report that the project not only met the designated metrics, it exceeded them, and has provided thousands of children in the region with the tools they need to achieve success in school and life. I've attached the evaluator's report from year one of the project for your review.

Even with this success, more must be done in the region and throughout the state. With the support of funding from the General Assembly, we believe that we can duplicate the results of the Appalachian project in other areas by utilizing portable vision care equipment, and providing logistical and scheduling support to school nurses and local eye doctors to provide care onsite. In addition to providing comprehensive eye care and glasses the program helps establish a relationship between the child and the local eye doctor to create a pathway to a lifetime of care.

The OOA respectfully requests the subcommittee consider an appropriation in the amount of up to $2.5 million over the biennium for the purpose of expanding the In-School Eye Exam (iSee) program to all regions of the state.

Should the legislature move forward with both initiatives discussed above – Medicaid reimbursement increases, and an appropriation to expand the iSee program – ***Ohio will lead the nation in properly addressing children's vision issues.***

OHIO
OPTOMETRIC
ASSOCIATION

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on House Bill 33. If you have questions or need additional information, please do not hesitate to contact me at (614) 781-0708 or kkerns@ooa.org or our consulting lobbyists Dan Leite and Courtney Saunders at (614) 224-9900.

Foundation for Appalachian Ohio's iSee Project Key Findings from Year 1 Evaluation

August 2022

Sara T. Stacy, PhD
Sonya Turner, MPA
Carissa Schutzman, PhD

UC EVALUATION SERVICES CENTER
Data Inspiring Change

The purpose of this report is to summarize key findings from the University of Cincinnati Evaluation Services Center evaluation of the Foundation for Appalachian Ohio's iSee project's first year of implementation (2021-22 school year). The iSee project will continue for a second year of implementation in the 2022-23 school year, and a comprehensive report will be available at the conclusion of the project.

Project Background

In partnership with the Foundation for Appalachian Ohio, Vision to Learn, and the Ohio Optometric Foundation, the iSee project uses mobile vision clinics to provide school-site vision care to students across Appalachian counties in Ohio. This is an inaugural effort launched under the ResultsOHIO model, an infrastructure within the Ohio Treasurer's Office, where upfront project costs are funded by private investors and government repayment to investors only occurs if verifiable results are achieved.

ResultsOHIO

FOUNDATION FOR APPALACHIAN OHIO

Vision To Learn
Focus on the Future

Ohio Optometric Foundation

Project Evaluation

The University of Cincinnati Evaluation Services Center (UCESC) serves as the external, independent evaluator to measure the payment metrics and learning agenda for this project.

Payment Metrics
These indicators determine the extent to which the project will be supported by public dollars. The payment metrics for the iSee project are:

1. **Eye Exam Percentage:** Percentage of students who received eye exams from Vision to Learn in participating Title I schools in Appalachian Ohio, out of the total students consented and referred.

2. **Eyeglasses Percentage:** Percentage of students who received eyeglasses from Vision to Learn in participating Title I schools in Appalachian Ohio, out of the total students who were prescribed glasses.

Learning Agenda
These indicators support the learning and growth of the project to answer questions beyond the payment metrics.

⚙ Payment Metrics

Data Sources & Analyses

Vision to Learn developed electronic health records for all students referred for an eye exam. Records were de-identified and provided to UCESC for data analysis. Datasets were cleaned, merged, and analyzed using SPSS statistical software. Descriptive analyses were conducted to determine the extent to which the iSee project achieved target payment metrics.

👫 The iSee project served students attending schools in Appalachian Ohio

In the 2021-22 school year, mobile vision clinics were delivered in partnership with 10 school districts serving students in grades K-12. After an initial screening, identified students were referred to the iSee mobile vision clinics for a comprehensive eye exam.

The iSee project, by the numbers:

1841 Students received an eye exam

1535 Students were prescribed eyeglasses

425 Students were referred for a serious eye condition

Students Receiving Eye Exam (2021-2022)	
School Districts	**Students**
Caldwell Exempted Village School District	98
Cambridge City School District	301
East Guernsey Local School District	116
Logan-Hocking School District	352
New Philadelphia City School District	123
Noble Local School District	117
Rolling Hills Local School District	242
Vinton County Local Schools	225
Western Local School District	70
Zanesville City School District	197
Total	**1841**

① The iSee project met the target metric for "Eye Exam Percentage"

95%
Referred students received an eye exam

✔ Target achieved

Results indicate that the mobile vision clinics met the target payment metric by providing comprehensive eye exams to over 90% of referred students within the ten school districts served in Appalachian Ohio.

② The iSee project met the target metric for "Eyeglasses Percentage"

100%
Students prescribed glasses received new glasses

✔ Target achieved

Results indicate that the mobile vision clinics met the target payment metric by providing new eyeglasses to over 90% of students prescribed eyeglasses within the ten school districts served in Appalachian Ohio.

⚙️ Learning Agenda

Data Sources & Analyses

UCESC partnered with the iSee project team to develop an online survey to gather perspectives from parents and guardians[2] about their experiences with the mobile vision clinic. District liaisons (e.g., district staff, nurses) from participating schools were identified to distribute survey links to parents. Each liaison developed unique distribution strategies, including survey reach (i.e., all parents within the district or only parents of children who received eye exams) and recruitment methods (e.g., text message, phone calls, social media, email, district website). Parents responded to the survey questions using Qualtrics, an online survey platform.

Datasets were cleaned, merged, and analyzed using SPSS statistical software. Descriptive and inferential statistics were conducted to reveal basic data patterns and document student changes. Responses to open-ended survey questions were reviewed to understand meaning and then grouped into thematic categories. Key quantitative findings are presented with themes from open-ended comments to add additional context.

👪 Parents participated in a survey to provide feedback about the iSee project

UCESC partnered with four school districts to gather parent perspectives on the iSee project. Due to differences in parent responses, it should be noted that responses largely represent perspectives of parents from two districts: Cambridge City School District & Rolling Hills Local School District. While survey results from this limited sample is not representative to all parents, these findings provide an opportunity to begin exploring the learning agenda for the iSee project.

Survey included:

191 Parents participated in feedback surveys

48% Parents reported their child received an eye exam from the mobile vision clinic

Parent Survey Responses	
School Districts	**Parents**
Cambridge City School District	52
East Guernsey Local School District	12
Rolling Hills Local School District	122
Zanesville City School District	5
Total	**191**

To gather perceptions of the mobile vision clinics, parents of children who received eye exams were asked: How satisfied are you with the services your child received at the vision clinic? A total of 84 parents responded to this question.

78% Parents reported high levels of satisfaction with the mobile vision clinics

👓 Parents reported on the value of providing access to vision care and glasses

To understand the service needs of the community, parents of children who received glasses from the mobile vision clinics were asked: If your child had not received glasses through the mobile vision clinic this year, would you have been able to get glasses somewhere else? A total of 84 parents responded to this question.

39% Parents reported "No" or "I don't know" about their ability obtain glasses elsewhere

[2] For brevity, the term "parents" is used to represent parents, guardians, or caregivers who responded to the survey

⚙ Learning Agenda, continued

To understand how students utilized the glasses they received, parents of children who received glasses from the mobile vision clinics were asked: As far as you know, how often does your child wear glasses at school? A total of 88 parents responded to this question.

83% Parents reported that their child wears their glasses every day or most days of the week

👁 Parents reported on the value of the referrals for serious eye conditions
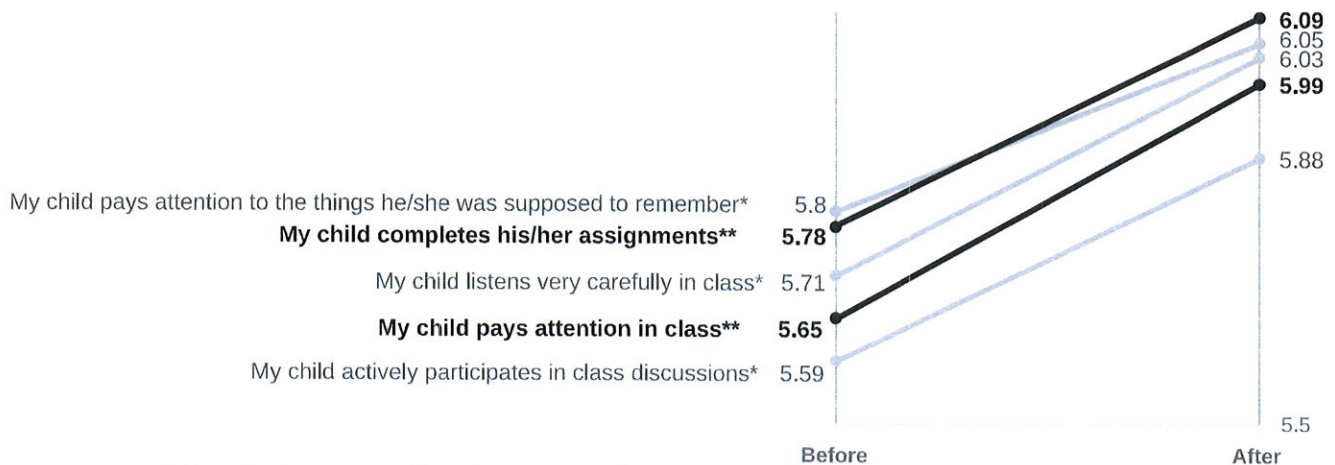
In addition to providing glasses, the mobile vision clinics also identified children who needed further assessment for serious eye conditions. Parents who reported that their child received a referral were asked: Were you able to get your child to the doctor for help with the serious eye condition? A total of nine parents responded to this question.

78% Parents reported that they were able to get their child to the doctor for help with an eye condition

📈 Parents reported the impact of the iSee project on student outcomes

Parents of children who received glasses or referrals for a serious eye condition were asked to reflect on their child's class participation before and after receiving glasses or treatment. A range of 75 to 81 parents responded to each of these questions. Results in the figure below demonstrate changes that were statistically significant, meaning changes were greater than could be expected by chance.

Overall, parents observed many significant positive changes in their child's class participation after receiving glasses or treatment.

	Before	After
My child pays attention to the things he/she was supposed to remember*	5.8	6.09
My child completes his/her assignments**	**5.78**	6.05
My child listens very carefully in class*	5.71	6.03
My child pays attention in class**	**5.65**	**5.99**
My child actively participates in class discussions*	5.59	5.88

Notes. Responses ranged from 0 – Not true at all, to 7 – Very true; *results are statistically significant at $p < .05$, **results are significant at $p < .01$

About the authors

🔍 The University of Cincinnati Evaluation Services Center has served as an independent evaluator for hundreds of projects in Ohio and nationally since its founding in 1996. The UCESC team of specialists has expertise in statistics, measurement, assessment, and qualitative research methods within the fields of education and public health.

UC EVALUATION SERVICES CENTER
Data Inspiring Change

🌐 www.uc.edu/evaluationservices   ✉ eval@uc.edu   📞 (513) 556-3900