

Testimony Supporting Senate Bill 129
Senate Health Committee
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April 24, 2024

Chairman Huffman, Vice Chairman Johnson, Ranking Member Antonio, and Members of the Senate Health Committee - thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today on behalf of the Ohio Optometric Association on Senate Bill 129. My name is Juliana Mazzotta, and I am a third, soon to be fourth, year student at The Ohio State University College of Optometry. I am the outgoing Trustee of our college's branch of the American Optometric Student Association and a devoted advocate of my future profession. As such, I strongly urge your support of Senate Bill 129.

As a student currently enrolled in the optometry program, I can assure you that graduates of our program are more than capable of performing the procedures detailed in SB 129 safely and effectively. But before I detail the specific training we receive for such skills, I recognize that many individuals outside of our profession are unfamiliar with the extent of an optometrist's education.

Our course load and clinic experience is extensive, thorough, and cutting edge. Like medical students, we complete 4 years of undergrad and then another 4 years in our professional program. Then, over 30% of our graduates continue on to pursue an optional residency where they further specialize and train among both optometrists and ophthalmologists. In 10 semesters over the 4 years of optometry school, we become experts on the anatomy, physiology, and pathology of the human eye. We are trained to be the nation's primary eye care professionals and to provide the fullest scope of medical optometric care that extends miles beyond the mere dispense of glasses and contact lenses. At OSU, we learn among the smartest optometry students in the country and are taught by the most knowledgeable and celebrated faculty in the country. The Ohio State University College of Optometry is one of 26 optometry schools across the United States, Puerto Rico, and Canada and is known to be one of the top programs both academically and clinically, if not the top. Our program has the highest passage rates on the national boards exams in the country and our clinical exposure is top-notch. By graduation, we will have each directly examined at least 1800 patients, not to mention additional patient encounters through community screenings, scribing, Eyewear Gallery, and grand rounds cases. We are thoroughly exposed to all primary and sub-specialties of optometry, and we are prepared to manage any patient that sits in our chair.

Regarding the procedures addressed in SB 129, I am currently undergoing the training to perform them, and I can speak firsthand about the comprehensiveness and detail of this training. Our training is individualized, in-depth, backed by research, and taught with patient safety at the forefront. I am currently enrolled in two courses which directly address the ins and outs of these procedures and are titled "Injections, Lasers, and Advanced Ocular Techniques" and "Surgery and Co-management of Ocular Disease". These courses provide practical experience and all knowledge and training necessary to perform injections, ophthalmic laser procedures, and other advanced techniques as well as thoroughly educate us on the pre- and post-op management of these cases. These are semester-long courses that extend from January to May. We receive letter grades - not pass-fail - and the material taught is covered on all three parts of our national boards exams. Aside from passing a didactic course, every student is guaranteed to be proficient in these procedures in

order to continue through the program. We must pass multiple practicals proctored by licensed instructors to perfect these skills and ensure that our patients are guaranteed the utmost safety and comfort. Once again, I assure you that we are thoroughly trained to perform these procedures safely and effectively. But the current scope of practice in Ohio prevents us from doing so upon graduating.

Ohio's scope of practice for optometry has not been updated in 15 years. For reference, 15 years ago in 2009, I was 10 years old, Apple launched the iPhone 3 igniting the rise of the smartphone, the iPad did not exist, the widespread use of electronic health records was only recently encouraged by the HITECH (Health Information Technology for Economic and Clinical Health) Act of 2009, and the world was clearly a very different place. More relevantly, the last 20 years have transformed surgical care which now revolves around minimally invasive procedures and the utilization of tablets in the clinical setting. Changes in technology and practice standards have advanced tremendously.

Thanks to these technological advancements, the procedures addressed in SB 129 are simple to perform with proper training and are embedded with numerous safety mechanisms. Optometric scope of practice in Ohio must catch up to these advancements. SB 129 would modernize the practice of optometry in Ohio, bringing it into closer alignment with the standards in surrounding states and moving it closer to the education and training that my classmates and I are currently receiving. If SB 129 does not pass and optometric scope is not expanded and modernized in Ohio, I am confident that Ohio will continue lose some of the outstanding recruits and top graduates in the country to other more competitive states; myself included.

Throughout my journey to optometry, I, like many of my classmates, have pursued the institutions that will optimize my education and allow me to become the most capable, knowledgeable, compassionate, and skilled optometrist that I can be. I grew up in Connecticut, pursued my undergraduate degree in Biology at the University of Miami in Florida, then I moved to Columbus in search of the best possible optometric education. At Ohio State, I have found that and more. But as I search for the state with the most fruitful and fulfilling career opportunity, my fellow graduates and I will hold ourselves to those same standards, and without a doubt, the scope of practice in each state is one of the strongest determinants of this decision. In fact, a recent study found that 71% of graduating optometrists report that a state's scope of practice is a factor in determining where to locate following graduation. Soon-to-be graduates like myself have invested years of our lives and hundreds of thousands of dollars into our optometric education, and unfortunately, because of Ohio's antiquated laws, we will not be able to utilize the full extent of our education and training in this state unless SB 129 is adopted. We can, however, in surrounding states like Kentucky, Indiana, and West Virginia, or other attractive states, like Colorado and Virginia, but not Ohio.

Aside from retaining graduates, modernizing the scope of practice for Ohio optometrists to include the procedures in SB 129 is vital for access to care in our state and will help relieve some of the burden on ophthalmologists whose numbers in their field are stagnant and whose waitlists are extensive. Ohioans need this care, and optometrists are capable of providing it. If our scope remains where it is now, our ability to preserve the sight of your constituents to our highest ability remains as wasted potential. To meet patient needs and ensure a robust eye care workforce for the future, it is critical that the General Assembly works to enact the measured and reasonable

changes outlined in SB 129. On behalf of myself and my future colleagues, I am asking for your support of SB 129, and I thank you for your time and consideration.