

Testimony Supporting Senate Bill 129
Senate Health Committee
Taylor Babcock, O.D.
Portsmouth, Ohio
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Chairman Huffman, Vice Chairman Johnson, Ranking Member Antonio, and Members of the Senate Health Committee:

Thank you all for the opportunity to address you today. I am excited to engage with you on SB 129 and explain how it would help to better serve the constituents throughout the state of Ohio and the patients under my care. My name is Dr. Taylor Babcock. I am an optometrist and small business owner in private practice in Portsmouth, Ohio, where I was born and raised. I graduated from Miami University in 2008 with a degree in Botany and received my doctorate in optometry from the Pennsylvania College of Optometry at Salus University in 2014.

Upon graduation I moved back to Portsmouth to work with my father in practice. In fact, I am a 4th generation optometrist. My great-grandfather, grandfather, father and I have served the greater Portsmouth Ohio area since 1916. I have patients that travel over an hour to see me from many rural areas such as Adams, Pike and Lawrence counties, these are places where the accessibility to primary eye care services is limited. We have been successful in serving our community for generations due to the simple fact that our patients trust and know that our primary concern is their overall health and well-being. Part of that trust includes knowing their optometrist is offering them the most up to date technologies and treatments available. Our practice has seen an improvement in patient care and outcomes over generations due periodic enhancements in the scope of practice for Ohio Optometrists.

Optometrists are a key piece in the overall healthcare puzzle. Optometrists are able to comprehensively evaluate visual health and help people see clearly. We provide preventive care and examine, treat and manage many diseases of the eyes. Additionally, through a comprehensive eye exam we can identify many systemic health conditions such as diabetes and cardiovascular disease. Optometrists work collaboratively with the patient's primary care physician which results in better overall care and outcomes. Optometrists are uniquely qualified to have a firm understanding of the visual system and its relationship to the entire body.

SB 129 would modernize the optometric scope of practice to allow removal of Obviously benign lesions such as cysts and skin tags, perform 3 non-invasive laser procedures which treat conditions we commonly encounter, and update our pharmaceutical regulations. These procedures are currently successfully being performed by optometrists in several other states throughout the country including our neighboring states of Indiana, West Virginia, and Kentucky. This is of particular interest to me since I practice along the Ohio River in Portsmouth. Due to my location and caring for many patients that reside in Kentucky, I made the decision to become dual licensed to practice in both Ohio and Kentucky. I chose to become licensed in Kentucky as I think it is important to maintain my licensing and education

to the highest level and standard of care for an optometrist, independent of which state I practice. I felt that if I was caring for patients from Kentucky, I owe it to them to give them the same standard of care that their legislation passed and felt was appropriate for the citizens of Kentucky. In order to become licensed in Kentucky, I took the required extensive coursework set forth by the Kentucky State Board of Optometry and successfully demonstrated competency and knowledge in performing the procedures outlined in SB 129. I have been licensed to perform these procedures since 2017. To maintain my Kentucky license, I am also required to take additional continuing education hours on these specific procedures annually.

I am encouraged by the introduction of SB 129 and its potential effect on my ability to provide more services and treatment options to the community. As previously mentioned, my family has spent over 100 years earning the trust of my community. I would not testify in support of anything that I feel could be harmful to my patients. With the education on lasers and lid lesion removal both from the Pennsylvania College of Optometry and the additional Kentucky certification coursework, I am confident that we can deliver this expanded care safely. In fact, I feel this would only provide better access to care.

Because the current laws that govern optometry in Ohio have not been updated in 15 years to allow me to perform these same procedures I am licensed to perform in Kentucky, I currently must refer my patients to have these procedures to either an ophthalmologist in the Portsmouth area or potentially to another optometrist in Kentucky. This referral process takes additional time, adds cost and complexity for patients to travel and establish themselves with a second eye care provider. In the meantime, it also leaves them visually vulnerable for a period of time while they wait to be treated. In the case of a YAG capsulotomy, which treats a clouding, or film, that develops after cataract surgery, many times patients may have to wait 1-2 months before having this procedure with an ophthalmologist. I could potentially get them in quicker if they travel to an optometrist in Kentucky, but then I am sending them out of state, and adding extra time and cost. They experience blurry vision until the laser is performed that could have potentially been treated by me in a much more expeditious and less complicated process in my office where they feel comfortable and have an established relationship. It is frustrating to know that if I opened an office across the border, I could have taken care of them.

I believe that the question of whether optometrists are adequately trained for these procedures is clearly, Yes, as I have been through that training and can testify on its behalf.

Ultimately, I want what is best for my patients and I would not do anything that could potentially be a disservice to them. That is why I am confident in testifying to give optometrists in Ohio the statutory authority to perform the reasonable procedures asked for in SB 129. I would not ask for these privileges if I was not completely confident that we are qualified, trained and beyond capable of performing them.

Thank you for your time and consideration and I look forward to answering your questions.