

Testimony Supporting Senate Bill 129
Senate Health Committee
Dr. Michael Earley
April 24, 2024

Chairman Huffman, Vice Chairman Johnson, Ranking Member Antonio and the members of the Senate Health Committee; my name is Dr. Michael Earley and I have the honor of speaking today in support of Senate Bill 129, legislation sponsored by Senator Jerry Cirino to modernize Ohio's scope of practice for Doctors of Optometry. Today I am representing myself as a practicing optometrist for 36 years and the past president of the Ohio Optometric Association. However, I would also like to share with the committee my knowledge gained from my role as the Associate Dean of Academic Affairs at The Ohio State University College of Optometry, a position I have held for 10 years, and as the Chair of the Admission Committee for our college, a role that I have held for 20 years.

As Dr. Muckley stated in her testimony, I have first-hand knowledge of interacting with both potential and current optometry students regarding decisions to attend the Ohio State University for their optometric education and ascending optometry students about where they will choose to locate their lives and practices after graduating from Ohio State. I am very involved in both of these processes, and in spite of some claims you may hear in later testimony on this bill, I can tell you without reservation that Ohio's current scope of practice for optometrists is indeed limiting when I recruit people to come to Ohio and restrictive in my efforts to retain their skills for Ohio patients after graduation. Our current scope of practice DOES impact Ohio's workforce, both in terms of building that workforce and enhancing and maintaining that workforce regarding quality vision care.

The Ohio State University College of Optometry is considered nationally as one of, if not THE, premier program in the country. Our college leads EVERY outcome measure used for accreditation, including academic strength of incoming cohorts, first-time national board passage rates, residency match percentages and satisfaction of employment after graduation. We recruit the best, educate at the highest level, and graduate the best prepared students in the country. We are the applicants "reach school," the school applicants aspire to attend, as our graduates are also heavily recruited around the country. I would also strongly disagree with anyone who would come before this committee and express an opinion that would consider any expansion of training that we do in the area of patient procedures inferior to other schools. Our college can indeed prepare students as well as colleges in Oklahoma, Kentucky, Indiana or anywhere else.

Our faculty have worked extremely hard to ensure that Ohio does indeed have the premier optometry program in the country and this dedication allows us to continue to recruit at the highest level each year. However, I am already seeing as the Chair of Admissions, and what will ultimately continue to grow to truly harm our recruiting and retention efforts, is the fact that we cannot claim to teach at the highest level of practice of contemporary optometry, because we cannot provide the patient experience for our students to be laser certified at graduation. We provide students

with all the didactic and hands-on practice that any state requires, but they cannot do these procedures on a patient so they have to obtain this certification after they graduate.

Optometry colleges in bordering states such as Kentucky and Indiana can state that their students graduate with laser certification. I can absolutely state that Ohio has lost high quality students because they went to a college where they will graduate with this patient experience. As more states pass scope expansion, more schools in those other states will add additional clinical experience to their programs, thereby continuing to anchor states like Ohio when it comes to student recruiting and retention. That is a fact from someone who sees this up close in real world situations.

Ohio State's College of Optometry educates our students extensively in ocular anatomy and physiology. Our program includes multiple courses in slit lamp and gonioscopy skills which are skills needed to use the laser safely. Our program includes numerous semester-long, hands-on procedure lab courses in which students learn and practice the skills required for successful performance of the specific procedures contained in SB 129. Students are required to take numerous practicals that must be passed to ASSURE that every student has developed the needed skills to perform these clinical skills efficiently. Our optometric national boards, which are required to be passed to practice in any state, tests these skills in a single controlled testing center with standardized patients. I believe SB 129 is a well-measured, moderate request to modernize Ohio's scope of practice for optometrists. We believe this legislation will allow patients to benefit by reducing current patient waiting times due to the growing shortage of ophthalmologists; a shortage that is known to be getting worse annually according to ophthalmology's own reports.

I would like to briefly share with you some of the statistics from other states that have already enhanced their optometric scopes of practice to the betterment of patients. Specifically, optometrists have been performing laser procedures in Oklahoma for 32 years. Over 50,000 procedures have been performed by optometrists and those patient outcomes have equivalent outcomes to procedures performed by ophthalmologists. Since 2011, over 40,000 laser procedures have been performed in Kentucky by optometrists with no complaints or adverse outcome reports. Since 2014, optometrists in Louisiana have performed 14,000 additional procedures with zero negative outcomes reports. I strongly believe that the combined over 100,000 procedures performed in the aforementioned states that have expanded their scope of practice for optometry provides this committee with "real world" evidence that Ohio's optometrists will be properly trained and educated to handle the additional procedures specifically contained in SB 129.

Lastly, our professional association would never ask the General Assembly to grant us the statutory right to do procedures that we are not properly trained and educated to perform and thereby place the safety of our patients in jeopardy. In future hearings, you may hear testimony from opponents of Senator Cirino's bill that our request for a moderate expansion of our scope of practice is not warranted, as optometrists do not have an equivalent three-year residency following medical school and internship. Optometry is clearly stating that while our education path may be different, our doctors and students are, and will be, very properly trained and educated to perform

the very specific procedures requested in SB 129. Mr. Chairman, members of the committee, with your permission I would like to turn this over to two of our current outstanding students at the College of Optometry to personally share their respective stories on how Ohio's current limiting scope of practice is impacting their future professional plans.