



Written Proponent Testimony
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Senate Bill 129
Ohio Senate Health Committee
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Chairman Huffman, Vice Chair Johnson, Ranking Member Antonio, and members of the Ohio Senate Health Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony in support of Senate Bill 129. Senate Bill 129 is important legislation which takes a measured approach to improving access to eye care services and ensuring Ohio retains an adequate eye care workforce.

My name is Keith Kerns and I am the Chief Executive Officer of Optometric Management Group (OMG), a doctor-owned and operated multi-location private practice. OMG provides comprehensive optometric services in 17 locations throughout the state, with a dedicated team comprised of 40 Doctors of Optometry and nearly 200 total employees. Prior to joining OMG, I served as the Executive Director for the Ohio Optometric Association for eight years. During my time with the OOA, the organization successfully worked with this body and the administration to improve access to comprehensive eye care services and glasses for children, and to strengthen the state's Medicaid vision program. Thank you for your support of these initiatives.

Also during this time period, the OOA began a multi-year, comprehensive review of Ohio's laws governing optometry to ensure that these regulations keep pace with contemporary practice expectations and the education provided at The Ohio State University College of Optometry and other accredited institutions. The last review of these standards occurred 15 years ago. Over the course of several years, the OOA extensively reviewed eye care professionals' practice patterns, educational standards, the scope of practice in other jurisdictions, and patient and provider demographics; met with interested parties, including regional, state and national entities; and identified voids in patient care and how best to alleviate those gaps.

The review identified a number of challenges facing Ohio with regards to access to vision care, but also identified a variety of potential solutions. Senate Bill 129 represents a collection of these solutions. The proposed changes in the bill are measured and reasonable incremental steps to modernize the practice of optometry, and each of these steps have been implemented in other jurisdictions with successful results in improving patient access to needed services without any known adverse occurrences or significant negative impact on other service providers.

Modernizing the practice of optometry in Ohio is necessary for a number of key reasons:

- *Access to Needed Services.* As our population ages, more eye care services are required. Optometrists are experts in eye and vision care and are well-equipped to provide high quality care.

- *Team Approach to Health Care.* SB 129 will help foster a collaborative approach to providing eye care. Optometrists obtain over 10,000 hours of education focused solely on the eye and visual system, making the profession an ideal complement to ophthalmology, much more so than physician extenders who may currently be providing some of the procedures outlined in SB 129 and who only receive a fraction of the instruction on the eye and visual system as compared to a Doctor of Optometry.
- *Workforce Concerns.* As other jurisdictions act to ensure that their laws and regulations reflect the current instruction in accredited colleges of optometry, it will become difficult for Ohio to retain an adequate supply of optometrists. For many years, graduates of The Ohio State University College of Optometry and other accredited institutions have received instruction and training on the procedures outlined in SB 129 and many other procedures which are not addressed in the legislation. Optometrists seek to utilize these skills for the betterment of their patients' vision and lives. In many states, including most of those surrounding Ohio, new optometrists can do just that and practice to the full extent of their training. This, in turn, makes those jurisdictions more attractive and leaves Ohio at a disadvantage. As a growing Ohio-based business and employer of dozens of Doctors of Optometry this is a major concern for OMG and other similarly situated entities.

If adopted, Senate Bill 129 will help Ohio meet its eyecare workforce challenges and continue to provide high quality comprehensive care to residents of our state. I urge your support of this important measure and would be happy to provide you more information or answer any questions. Please do not hesitate to contact me at kkerns@omgvision.com. Thank you for your consideration.



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