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Testimony Supporting “OhioSEE” Children’s Vision Proposal  
House Bill 96  
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Chairman Stewart, Vice Chairman Dovilla, Ranking Member Sweeney, and members of the House Finance Committee. My name is Dr. Elizabeth Muckley and on behalf of the primary eye care doctors that make up the Ohio Optometric Association, I would like to convey our support for the inclusion of and funding for the “OhioSEE” children’s vision initiative in House Bill 96. The OOA shares the vision of Governor DeWine and the Ohio General Assembly to eradicate the “unmet care gap” for school-age children who fail school vision screenings and who need a comprehensive eye exam to better their ability to learn in school.

Children’s vision issues require special attention. An estimated 25% of school-aged children have vision problems that may affect their ability to learn. However, only 15% have had a comprehensive eye exam by the time they enter kindergarten. While school vision screenings are a valuable first step in identifying potential issues, it is crucial to ensure that children receive comprehensive eye exams to accurately diagnosis and treat vision problems such as binocular vision disorders or visual perceptual delays.

Currently, less than 30% of children who fail school vision screenings receive follow-up care. This low rate is attributed to factors such as financial hardship, lack of awareness about eye care, logistical challenges, work schedules, and limited appointment availability in some areas. Governor DeWine's "OhioSEE" proposal aims to significantly reduce or eliminate the gap between failed vision screenings and access to comprehensive eye exams and vision care, a goal long shared by Ohio’s optometrists.

In partnership with our charitable foundation, The Ohio Optometric Foundation, Ohio’s optometrists have a long history of providing thousands of comprehensive eye exams, glasses and other necessary materials at no cost to communities and schools across the state. The OOA has also worked with the Ohio General Assembly for the past two budgets to secure targeted funding for underserved areas of Ohio to provide additional services for students who fail these screenings and need additional eye care with impressive results. The investment from the state, coupled with optometry’s charity care, have produced measurable positive outcomes for these students and their families. Through comprehensive examination, serious conditions such as amblyopia and significant refractive error have been detected. As a result, Ohio has become a national leader in addressing children's vision issues.

Despite this success, there is still more we can do as a state to enhance vision care and provide children with the best opportunity to learn and succeed throughout the state. Ohio’s Doctors of Optometry strongly support the “OhioSEE” proposal in HB 96, recognizing it as a critical step forward in expanding access to essential eye care.

The Ohio Optometric Association (OOA) and our charitable partners at the Ohio Optometric Foundation are committed to working alongside the General Assembly and Governor DeWine to ensure the successful implementation of this initiative. We were honored to be selected to serve on the Children’s Vision Strike Force under the direction of The Ohio Department of Health Director Dr. Bruce Vanderhoff, which brought together a diverse group of stakeholders dedicated to children's vision. This collaboration marked the



beginning of discussions on developing the statewide “OhioSEE” program. The Children's Vision Strike Force explored the most effective ways to bring vision care and comprehensive eye exams directly to local communities. The discussions focused on eliminating barriers to access for children and their families, including ensuring that children receive glasses when needed.

Because the Ohio Optometric Association and our partners at the Ohio Optometric Foundation have extensive experience in the key issues that are the heart of the new children's vision initiative proposed by Governor DeWine in HB 96, we encourage you and your colleagues to take advantage of this expertise as the initiative's details are refined during the budget deliberation process. Optometry's enduring dedication to children's vision and improving the lives of children and families through exceptional eye care remains unwavering. We are excited to collaborate in bringing the “OhioSEE” program to life across Ohio.

I would also like to take a moment to express my support for the budget proposal presented to this committee by Director Gonzales and the Ohio Vision Professionals Board. The Ohio Optometric Association and our members share a positive and collaborative working relationship with Director Gonzales and the Board. We have confidence in their thoughtful and responsible management of our members' license fees in the operation of the Board. The OOA also appreciates Director Gonzales' comments during her budget testimony, particularly regarding the ongoing commitment of optometrists to providing primary eye care to all Ohioans and the opportunity that could be before the General Assembly to enhance the ability of those nationally trained and educated optometrists to do more for Ohioans in eye care.

Chairman Stewart, Vice Chairman Dovilla, Ranking Member Sweeney and members of the House Finance Committee, thank you for allowing me to testify today on behalf of the Ohio Optometric Association and our members. As we progress in this state budget deliberation process, please feel free to update me or our Legislative Counsel, Dan Leite and Courtney Saunders of Capitol Advocates, on any issues that might arise during testimony or debate on HB 96. I will be happy to answer any questions that members of the committee may have at this time.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Muckley, OD, FAAO  
CEO & Executive Director, The Ohio Optometric Association