

Testimony Supporting Senate Bill 36
Stephanie George, OD, MS, Ocular Disease Resident
September 22, 2025

Chairman Huffman, Vice Chairman Johnson, Ranking Member Liston, and Members of the Senate Health Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of SB 36. My name is Dr. Stephanie George, and I am here to express my strong support for SB 36. As a graduate of The Ohio State University College of Optometry and former Ocular Disease resident who practiced in Ohio, I believe that this bill is crucial for maintaining and recruiting highly trained and accessible optometrists that could meet the growing demand for eye care in Ohio.

I was born and raised in Dublin, OH and graduated in 2024 from Ohio State with my Doctorate of Optometry and Masters of Vision Science. My optometric education was a rigorous 4-year professional program following four years of my undergraduate education. During this time, my classmates and I received over 10,000 hours of education focused on the eye, visual health system, and related systemic conditions. We learned the latest technology, medications, and were trained to the highest level of scope, which includes the minor procedures outlined in SB 36, as the scope of practice in other states permits optometrists to perform these procedures. To continue in the program, we had to pass all courses, including the course titled "Injections, Lasers, and Advanced Ocular Techniques." We were required to successfully complete the laboratory component of this class, which involved passing practicals and demonstrating proficiency in all of the procedures outlined in SB 36.

After passing three National Board Examinations, I received licensure and completed an optional one-year residency to further my training at Specialty Eye Institute in Toledo. In one year, I saw over 3,700 patients. I managed diseases such as glaucoma and macular degeneration, and the ophthalmologists at the practice entrusted me to manage post-operative care for cataract surgery, LASIK, and other procedures. Not only do I co-manage with ophthalmologists, I send patient reports to rheumatology, endocrinology, and other specialties, order lab work and imaging, and send patients to the emergency room when indicated.

Given what I do now, consider the last time the laws governing optometry in Ohio were updated, which was 17 years ago when I was 10 years old and learning my multiplication tables. Society, technology, and medicine have made vast advancements since then. However, Ohio's outdated laws limit the ability of optometrists to apply the full extent of our training in clinical practice. SB 36 is the step forward that will allow optometrists to practice to the highest level of our training, which is important given the growing need for eye care in Ohio.

As Ohio's population continues to age, it is estimated that 30% more eye care will be required in the coming years. However, Ohio's ophthalmology field has seen slow growth in new providers, and fewer ophthalmologists are practicing in rural areas, where access to care is already limited. During residency, I saw patients twice per month in the satellite office in rural Bryan, OH, where the three surrounding counties do not have any full-time ophthalmologists. One of the ophthalmologists at the practice sees patients in Bryan once per month to address this gap and perform these in-office laser procedures outlined in SB 36 along with more extensive surgical evaluations, but the schedule is often booked months in advance, and many patients are reluctant to travel over an hour to the Toledo office. Barriers such as travel time, distance to appointments, and loss of work time for caregivers are making it more difficult for patients to receive the care they need. SB 36 will help alleviate these challenges by expanding access. Optometrists like

myself are trained to fill this gap in care and have been doing so in other states successfully since 1988.

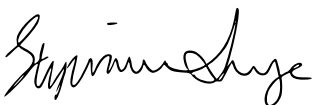
SB 36 will also help maintain Ohio's highly trained optometric workforce. Currently, many highly qualified graduates of The Ohio State University College of Optometry are leaving Ohio to practice in neighboring states where the scope of practice for optometrists is up-to-date with their training. In fact, 70% of optometry students report that a state's scope of practice is a key factor in determining where they choose to practice, myself included. Ohio's current laws are a barrier to attracting and retaining new graduates, especially those who want to practice to the highest level of scope. I am now practicing in a different state for personal reasons, but I am open to returning to Ohio if the right opportunity presents itself, and scope expansion will play a big role in my decision to return. Overall, SB 36 will help Ohio become a more attractive state for optometry graduates, ensuring that our workforce remains robust and capable of meeting the needs of our patients.

I'll leave you with this: every graduating optometrist takes an oath and pledges to practice optometry faithfully and prioritize their patients' needs first and foremost. We would not be asking you to consider this legislation unless we unequivocally believed it was of the best benefit for our patients. The last thing I would want to do is put my patients in danger. We are not asking for major surgical procedures that we are unqualified to perform. Rather, we are asking for the ability to perform minor in-office procedures that we learn how to perform as a part of our extensive training, and we will continue to refer to ophthalmology for advanced surgical care.

To summarize, SB 36 represents a crucial step forward to address Ohio's evolving eye care needs. By modernizing the scope of practice for optometrists, we can retain highly trained professionals, improve access to care, and reduce wait times for patients. Although I recently moved out of state, I hope to one day practice in my home state of Ohio to the highest degree of my training.

I strongly encourage you to support SB 36. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Stephanie George". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a small horizontal line above the first few letters.

Stephanie George, O.D., M.S.