

Senate Bill 36 Proponent Testimony  
Richard Edlow, OD  
April 9, 2025

Chairman Huffman, Vice Chair Johnson, Ranking Member Liston, and members of the Ohio Senate Health Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony in support of Senate Bill 36.

I am an optometrist with a background in economics. As such, I track the eye care industry nationwide, with a focus on future trends, to maximize the public health. Over the years I have become known as the “Eyeconomist” writing and presenting on issues including supply of eye care doctors, demand for eye care services and demographic shifts that affect the delivery of eye care. I regularly perform this analysis on both a national and statewide level.

The Ohio legislature has a rare and important opportunity to take proactive steps to protect public health, particularly for the state's aging population. Ohio’s population of those 60 years of age and older will represent over 26% of the population by 2030 and those 85+ are projected to increase by 51% from 2020 to 2040.<sup>1</sup>

Due to the high prevalence of age-related eye diseases such as cataracts, glaucoma, macular degeneration, and diabetic eye conditions, the aging population is driving a 2.5–3.0% annual increase in demand for eye care services.<sup>2</sup> The challenge arises as the demand for eye care continues to grow, while the demand for ophthalmologists is outpacing the available supply. A recent study published in the Journal of the American Academy of Ophthalmology projects that the supply of ophthalmologists will DECREASE by 12% from 2020 to 2035.<sup>3</sup> This could have consequences for the aging population in Ohio if ignored. It is estimated that as of 2025 the US has a shortage of 6,180 ophthalmologists across the country.<sup>4</sup> See *Fig. 1*

The ability to address this important public health challenge in Ohio is in your capable hands. The solution is to enable Ohio optometrists to deliver the essential care they are highly trained and fully qualified to provide. Multiple third-party studies have provided evidence that expanding the optometric scope of practice reduces vision impairment and helps address racial and ethnic disparities in eye health.<sup>5</sup>

Optimizing collaborative care by fostering strong partnerships between ophthalmologists and optometrists—whether within the same practice or through well-established referral networks—along with expanding the scope of optometric practice, will help meet the growing demand for eye care as the population ages.

I would also like to highlight the data on licensed optometrists in Ohio. Modernizing the optometric profession by expanding the scope of practice is crucial for workforce retention, ensuring that young practitioners remain in Ohio rather than relocating to states that allow

them to practice at the full extent of their training. As of March 2025, there are 2,336 licensed optometrists in Ohio.<sup>6</sup> Of this, 2,100 are actively practicing with only 1,745 listed having Ohio as their primary state of practice.<sup>7</sup> 57 hold dual licenses in IN and 92 in KY which are states with laser authority for optometrists.<sup>8</sup> Of note, Doctors of Optometry between the ages of 26-35 that designate Ohio as their primary state of practice make up only 19% of Ohio practicing ODs compared to 23% in all other age groups (36-45 (23%), 46-55 (23%), and 56-65 (23%).<sup>7</sup> See *Fig. 2* Furthermore, a data analysis of the last 3 graduating classes from the OSU College of Optometry also show that of 197 students, 52% left Ohio.<sup>9</sup>

During budget testimony, the Ohio State Medical Association reported a 6% increase in optometric licenses over the past year. However, our data suggests otherwise when examining the 26–35 age group. It was also noted that Ohio ranks among the top five states in the number of optometrists compared to its neighboring states. However, it is essential to consider population density when evaluating this claim. When measuring the number of optometrists per 100,000 residents, Ohio falls within the mid-range of surrounding states.

WVA = 12.1 ODs/100k

KY = 13.8 ODs/100k

MI = 14.8 ODs/100k

OH = 15.4 ODs/100k

PA = 16.3 ODs/100k

IN = 16.9 ODs/100k

Despite data indicating that young practitioners are leaving Ohio at higher rates than previous generations, ophthalmology workforce projections are even more concerning. Projected annual net growth of ophthalmology supply is only 0.4% due to minimal additions from residency programs and steady retirement rates. In 2024, for instance, 498 new ophthalmologists entered the workforce. With retirements, there was an estimated net decrease of 140 ophthalmologists nationwide.<sup>10</sup>

As demand continues to grow exponentially, optometry must step up to fill the void. I urge the Committee to support S.B. 36 considering all that it can do to ensure appropriate eye care for Ohio, and I thank you for the opportunity to share the impending data with you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'R. Edlow', with a small flourish at the end.

Richard C. Edlow, O.D.

Eyeconomist

\*Please see Figures and references on next page

FIGURE 1

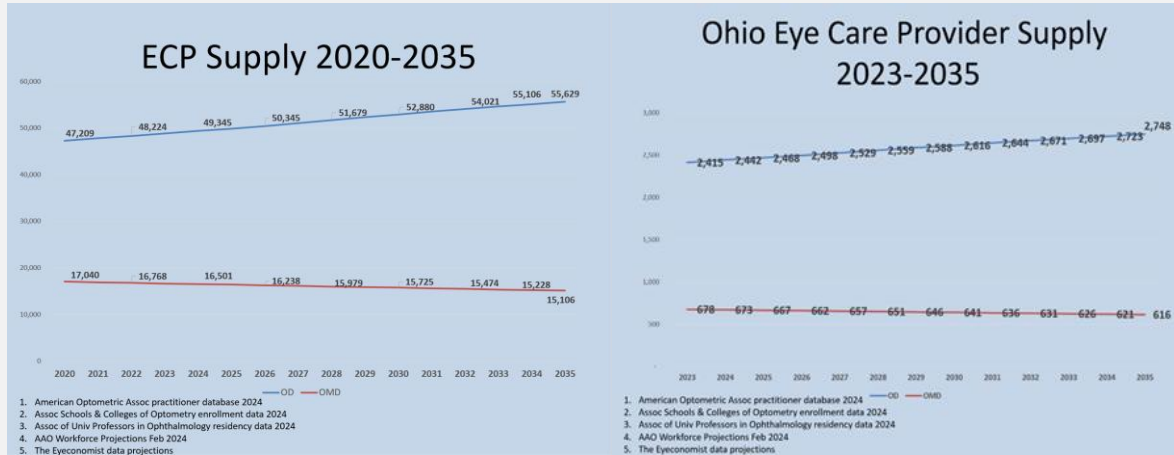


FIGURE 2

All Active Licenses in Ohio						
	All Licensed OH Docs	Primary State OH	Primary State not OH	All Licensed OH Docs (%)	Primary State OH (%)	Primary State not OH (%)
Total Active Licenses in Ohio as of 3/21/24	2,336	1,892	444	-	81%	19%
Also Licensed in Indiana	62	23	39	3%	1%	9%
Also Licensed in Kentucky	98	50	48	4%	3%	11%
Licensed in both Indiana & Kentucky	12	6	6	1%	0%	1%

Practicing Optometrists						
	All Licensed OH Docs	Primary State OH	Primary State not OH	All Licensed OH Docs (%)	Primary State OH (%)	Primary State not OH (%)
Total Practicing (Seeing Patients)	2,100	1,745	335	90%	83%	16%
Total Practicing with Indiana License	57	23	34	3%	1%	10%
Total Practicing with Kentucky License	92	47	42	4%	3%	13%
Practicing with both IN and KY license	10	6	4	0%	0%	1%
Total Practicing - Military or VA	133			6%		
Total Practicing with more than one license	459	192	267	22%	11%	80%
Total Practicing with more than FIVE licenses	34	3	31	2%	0%	9%
Age Groups of Ohio Licensed Practicing Docs						
26-35	485	324	161	23%	19%	48%
36-45	499	396	103	24%	23%	31%
46-55	483	406	77	23%	23%	23%
56-65	460	405	55	22%	23%	16%
66+	236	214	22	11%	12%	7%

<sup>1</sup> Miami University, Scripps Gerontology Center

<sup>2</sup> National Eye Institute, NIH

<sup>3</sup> Berkowitz ST, Finn AP, Parikh R, Kuriyan AE, Patel S. Ophthalmology Workforce Projections in the United States, 2020 to 2035. *Ophthalmology*. 2024 Feb;131(2):133-139. doi: 10.1016/j.ophtha.2023.09.018. Epub 2023 Sep 20. PMID: 3773923

<sup>4</sup> US Department of Health and Human Services

<sup>5</sup> Bae, Kihwan & Timmons, Edward & Nandy, Protik. (2023). Seeing is Believing: The Effects of Optometrist Scope of Practice Expansion. *SSRN Electronic Journal*. 10.2139/ssrn.4556268.

<sup>6</sup> Ohio Vision Professionals Board

<sup>7</sup> American Optometric Association Doctor of Optometry Master Data File, St. Louis, Missouri March 2025

<sup>8</sup> Indiana and Kentucky State Board of Optometry (from the American Optometric Association Master Data File)

<sup>9</sup> The Ohio Optometric Association Ohio State College of Optometry Student data file

<sup>10</sup> Assoc University Professors in Ophthalmology Residency Data 2024

AAO Workforce Projections 2020 > 2035

The Eyeconomist Workforce Projections 2024