



August 27, 2025

Dear Members of the Ohio Senate Health Committee,

My name is Dr. Nate Lighthizer and I am the Dean and Professor at the Northeastern State University College of Optometry in Oklahoma. Optometrists in Oklahoma have been safely performing office-based ophthalmic procedures including lasers since 1998. In total, I have done, or supervised students and residents performing well over 3,000 laser procedures in the nearly 16 years that I have been in Oklahoma. I also teach the Oklahoma Optometric Ophthalmic Procedures Certification Course around the country to train Doctors of Optometry to become certified in these procedures after they have graduated and been practicing. This course has become the standard for certifying optometrists in these procedures for over 30 years. As a result of this experience, I have also published evidence-based studies in peer-reviewed journals analyzing more than 146,000 laser procedures performed by Doctors of Optometry, demonstrating their safety and complication rates equivalent to those reported in ophthalmology.

The 3 laser procedures, YAG laser capsulotomy, laser PI, and SLT, are all procedures in which optometrists are well equipped and trained to handle and perform. The laser procedures are done with laser slit lamps that require the exact same skill set as performing a slit lamp to examine the eyes. This is a skill that optometrists spend 4 years of optometry school perfecting. Optometrists are masters of slit lamp exams. I can assure you that the most prominent skills needed to do a YAG cap, laser PI, or SLT are slit lamp skills and being able to focus on various structures in the eyes. Optometry students and optometrists do this every single day.

The benefits we have seen in OK are that patients can be treated locally, receive timelier treatment, and there is cost-savings for the patient and for the healthcare system. We have been able to provide more comprehensive care for our patients, especially in the rural parts of our state. As primary eye care providers, optometrists are usually the first to diagnose and initiate treatment for glaucoma. It would be a huge public health win for the Ohio public to have increased access to these procedures from eye doctors that are well trained to do them. Optometry is currently restricted to treating their glaucoma patients with eye drops, when in many instances an SLT laser is just as good if not a better option due to patient compliance issues with drops and side effects of eye medications. Ohio citizens deserve to have their primary eye doctor be able to treat their glaucoma with the best and most current options available which now includes SLT laser. Just like any other aspect of medicine, education and training have evolved in optometry school as technology has advanced.

Students that go to optometry school today currently receive training on laser procedures at 4 levels:

1. Didactically in the classroom where students take full courses on laser procedures. In those courses, they listen to lectures, watch videos of actual procedures and get to interact with instructors/professors, ask questions and learn.
2. In the laboratory where students get hands-on training with actual lasers. Model eyes are used to simulate the procedure. Students are doing procedures and training on model eyes in the lab to simulate actual procedures.

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3. Students are tested both on the classroom portion via written exams, and the laboratory hands-on portion via practicals/proficiencies where they are observed and graded by a faculty member/professor as they are doing the simulated procedures.
4. Doing live cases/laser procedures on real life patients under the supervision of attending doctors. This occurs for all of our 4th year optometry students here in Oklahoma where I am Dean. Because the current law in Ohio does not allow optometrists to do laser procedures, students are not able to get this 4th level of training in Ohio. So, if someone tells you “we can’t let the optometrists do these laser procedures because they don’t have the proper training”, the answer is because the law in Ohio does not allow them to get this final level of training.

We all probably agree that the training is better in 2025 than it was in 1990. The question could then be reasonably posed “well what if a doctor graduated from optometry school in 1990 and wants to do laser procedures now? How do we get them trained?” I would answer that question with this: if an ophthalmologist finished their ophthalmology training in 1990, how did he/she get trained on the SLT laser which came about after their formal training ended? The answer: they went to a weekend course or a 1-day course or were trained on how to do the SLT by a technician from the company that makes the laser. In other words, they built upon their education and training, and when a new procedure came about, they took an hours to days training course and added a new skill to their arsenal. An optometrist that graduated 30+ years ago would be doing the exact same thing.

At the invitation of the Ohio Optometric Association, our certification faculty from the Northeastern State University Oklahoma College of Optometry conducted the first certification course this past July for 50 optometric leaders in Ohio. The Ophthalmic Procedures Program addresses the comprehensive training needs of optometric physicians seeking credentials in advanced technical skills and encompasses all procedures outlined in SB 36. This rigorous, high-level course integrates both didactic instruction and hands-on practical training.

Minor Surgical Procedures for the Optometric Physician presents the educational and technical skills necessary for minor procedures performed in a primary eye care office setting. Topics include a review of facial and ocular anatomy, medical instruments, asepsis, ocular lesions, anesthesia, intradermal, intramuscular, and subconjunctival injections, wound management, basic suture technique, and techniques for performing in-office minor procedures. The indications for, alternatives to, and risks/benefits of all techniques are discussed, as well as management of possible complications. Multiple hours of video grand rounds of actual procedures performed by optometrists will be shown. In addition to lectures and video grand rounds, the course includes a hands-on workshop.

Laser Therapy for the Anterior Segment includes training and the opportunity to learn the technical skills required for performing anterior segment laser procedures. Topics include laser physics, laser tissue interactions, gonioscopy, and an in-depth discussion of the most-commonly performed clinical anterior segment laser procedures including YAG laser capsulotomy, laser peripheral iridotomy (PI), green laser trabeculoplasty (GLT), and selective laser trabeculoplasty (SLT). The indications, contraindications, alternative treatment options, risks, benefits, and procedural techniques are discussed in detail, as well as management of possible complications. Lecture is followed by hands-on laboratory training utilizing the Green, YAG, and SLT lasers.

After the many hours of hands-on workshops with lasers, injections, and lesion removal techniques, Ohio Doctors of Optometry left excited, invigorated and motivated to offer these much-needed services to their patients. After successful completion of the 32-hour course along with the passage of a written examination, the participants receive 2 certificates: Laser Procedures for the Optometric Physician and Minor Surgical Procedures for the Optometric Physician.

In conclusion, I am sure you are very proud to represent the citizens of Ohio as an elected member of the Senate. It goes without saying that you want what’s safe and best for your constituents. You want the best and brightest optometrists caring for your citizens whether it pertains to laser procedures, pediatric eye exams, contact lens eye exams, low vision exams, or general eye exams. Passing this law in Ohio will only help the Ohio citizens receive top notch care from well qualified optometrists, and also will facilitate Ohio being a location where the best and


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the brightest future eye doctors want to stay and practice.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me anytime.

Sincerely,

 o.D.

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