

**Andrew J. Steele, OD, FAAO, FASOS**

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The Honorable Members of the Ohio Senate Health Committee

Ohio Statehouse  
1 Capitol Square  
Columbus, OH 43215

Dear Esteemed Members of the Ohio Senate Health Committee,

I am writing to you as a proud graduate of The Ohio State University, where I earned my Doctorate of Optometry, and as a medical and surgical optometrist with nearly a decade of experience at Bennett & Bloom Eye Centers in Louisville, Kentucky. My journey in eye care has been shaped by the opportunity to practice to the full scope of my training—a privilege that incentivized my move to Kentucky and has since reinforced my belief in the transformative power of timely access to care. I urge you to support Senate Bill 36, the Primary Eye Care Modernization Bill, which represents a rare and remarkable win-win-win for optometrists, ophthalmologists, and, most importantly, the people of Ohio.

In my 10 years of practice, I have performed over 5,000 sight-saving laser procedures and thousands of oculoplastic procedures, directly witnessing the profound impact that accessible, high-quality eye care has on patients' lives. Yet, as Ohio's population ages and the demand for specialized eye care surges, the state faces a critical challenge: a looming shortage of ophthalmologists. Recent studies underscore this reality. According to a 2023 analysis published in *Ophthalmology*, the supply of full-time equivalent ophthalmologists in the United States is projected to decline by 12% by 2035, while demand is expected to rise by 24%, resulting in a 30% workforce inadequacy. This mismatch is even more pronounced in rural areas, where workforce adequacy could plummet to just 29% by 2035, compared to 77% in metropolitan regions. With an aging population driving a 34.1% increase in Americans over 65 by 2036 (per the Association of American Medical Colleges' 2024 projections), the need for timely interventions—such as those for cataracts, glaucoma, and macular degeneration—has never been more urgent.

Senate Bill 36 offers a forward-thinking solution by empowering properly trained optometrists to perform essential procedures within our scope of expertise. This is not about replacing ophthalmologists, whose surgical skills remain indispensable, but about complementing their

work to ensure Ohioans receive care when and where they need it. In Kentucky, where I practice, this expanded scope has allowed me to address urgent cases—preserving vision and improving quality of life—while freeing ophthalmologists to focus on complex surgeries. The result? A more efficient, collaborative eye care system that benefits all parties, especially patients.

States like Kentucky, Oklahoma, and Louisiana, which have embraced similar expansions, provide compelling evidence of success. Research from these regions shows reduced wait times, increased access to care in underserved areas, and higher patient satisfaction—all without compromising safety or quality. For Ohio, this legislation promises to alleviate pressure on an overburdened system, enhance public health outcomes, and ensure that our aging population is not left waiting for critical interventions that could prevent irreversible vision loss.

As an Ohio State alumnus, I take pride in the Buckeye State's legacy of innovation and excellence. Senate Bill 36 aligns with that tradition, offering a practical, patient-centered approach to a pressing public health challenge. I respectfully implore you to consider the voices of optometrists like me, the needs of our ophthalmologist colleagues, and the countless Ohioans who stand to benefit. By passing this bill, you will not only strengthen Ohio's health care infrastructure but also affirm your commitment to the well-being of your constituents.

Thank you for your time, leadership, and dedication to the people of Ohio. I would be honored to discuss this further or provide additional insights from my experience. Please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Andrew Steele". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with large, elegant loops.

Andrew J. Steele, OD, FAAO, FASOS

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