



**Occupational Licensing Review Testimony (ORC. 101.63, SB 255 GA 132<sup>nd</sup>)**

**House State and Local Government Committee**

**October 6, 2021**

**Marlene Anielski, Vision Professionals Board, Executive Director**

Good afternoon, Chair Wiggam, Vice Chair John and Ranking Member Kelly and members of the House State and Local Government Committee. I am Marlene Anielski and am the Executive Director of the Ohio Vision Professionals Board. Thanks for the opportunity to present information regarding our licensing responsibilities.

In January of 2018, the Ohio Vision Professionals Board (VPB) was formed as a result of the 132<sup>nd</sup> General Assembly consolidating the Board of Optometry and the Optical Dispensers Board. It achieved administrative efficiencies and regulatory functions. The VPB is the regulatory body for 7,000 eyecare professionals for the licensing of optometrists, opticians, and ocularists with registrations for apprentices. The governing board is comprised of seven members appointed by the governor which include licensees and a public member.

The mission of the Ohio VPB is to provide statewide leadership in protecting and serving Ohioans by effectively and efficiently regulating the practices of our eyecare professionals. Our full-time staff of four includes an executive director, an investigator and two administrative personnel.

The VPB serves Ohioans by protecting their vision through conducting on-site inspections. The VPB has a standard of conduct for our licensees / registrants and internally handles all the inspections. Typically, there are 50 on-site inspections annually, but have been limited with the current pandemic. Unfortunately, the VPB has seen with inspections conducted, the caseload is on an upward trend with various violations of individuals and the use of expired products. Another means of consumer input is through conducting investigations by receiving complaints. Our goal is for a proper resolution with compliance of applicable laws, rules and regulations. Offenses range from sexual misconduct and assault, substance abuse, practicing without a license, inaccurate eyewear, fraud, and utilizing expired products. For the serious offenses disciplinary actions are taken. Currently, there are two active consent agreements. The annual investigations conducted are about 70.

As outlined in our questionnaire, the Ohio Vision Professionals Board is self-supported through revenue generated from license applications and renewal fees. The fees range from \$20 to \$175 annually depending on the type of registration and license, which equates to about \$756,000 in revenue. The VPB does not receive any monies from the State's General Revenue Fund. As required, by the Ohio Revised Code ORC 4734.54, all receipts of the VPB are deposited into the Occupational and Professional Licensing Fund, also known as the 4K90 fund. The VPB is one of several boards that deposit into the 4K90 fund.

Our optometrist licensees require a four-year college degree and a doctorate from a college optometry program. Our ocularist and optician licensees can pursue a college degree or receive training through supervised apprentice programs ranging from 2,000 hours up to five years. Before becoming a licensee, all applicants must pass national accredited exams and background checks with annual continuing education requirements. Optometrists are licensed and regulated in 50 states. Opticians and ocularists are licensed and regulated in approximately 25 states.

In closing, the VPB has an enormous responsibility to be good stewards of licensing fees and to act in the best interest in protecting and serving Ohioans with educated and ethical eyecare professionals with the highest levels of accountability and professionalism. I thank the committee for the opportunity to share information about eyecare professionals as well as appreciate your time and attention and welcome your questions and comments.