



SGRC REGIONAL ADVOCACY MEETINGS CENTRAL

Central Regional Meeting Speaker Bios

Speakers

Matt Jones, O.D.

Dr. Jones has been a key figure in the multiple successes that Arkansas has seen over the last few years, both in the legislature and the courts. He helped coordinate the efforts and lead the charge in Little Rock during the 2019 passage of their scope bill and then helped drive the defense of this law in 2020 in both the courts and at the ballot box, simultaneously.

Dr. Jones also serves as a member of the AOA's State Government Relations Committee (SGRC).

Lisa Gontarek, O.D.

A 1997 graduate of Southern College of Optometry, Dr. Lisa Gontarek has a primary care private practice in Chesapeake, Virginia. She is a past president of the Virginia Optometric Association (VOA) and continues to be an active member serving on the Membership and Legislative committees. She has helped to develop and run the Virginia Optometric Leadership Training program to help get young ODs more involved at the state level. She was recognized as the VOA Keyperson of the Year in 2021 and the VOA Optometrist of the Year in 2022. Dr. Gontarek played a large role in helping Virginia become the eighth state to gain laser privileges in 2022 and hopes to share her experiences to help other states in their quest for scope expansion.

Bill Reynolds, O.D.

Dr. Reynolds is without equal when it comes to advocating for the profession of optometry. Not only has he been a driving force in his home state of Kentucky, playing a key role in becoming the second state to enact advanced scope of practice legislation, but he has tirelessly worked with states across the country to continue to move the profession forward.

Dr. Reynolds is a past president of the AOA, currently sits on the AOA Board of Trustees and is also the current AOA Advocacy Committee chair.

Rep. Theresa Mah

Theresa Mah is a trailblazing figure in Illinois politics. In 2016, she became the first person of Asian-American descent elected to the state's General Assembly. She's the co-chair of the Asian American Legislative Caucus and currently serves as the Caucus Chair for the Illinois House Democratic Leadership. She also serves on the legislative committees of K-12 Education Appropriations, Consumer Protection, Health Care Availability and Access, Immigration and Human Rights, and Health Care Licenses, among others. In 2022, she passed a bill allowing Optometrists to administer the COVID-19 vaccine and was honored with the Illinois Optometric Association (IOA) Legislator of the Year Award.

Lucas Hargraves

As founder of Hargraves Consulting, Lucas Hargraves has a strong track record on issues at the local, state and national levels. Throughout Hargraves' diverse career, he has built a reputation as a problem solver who sees projects through and gets things done. Hargraves has been lobbying at the Arkansas Capitol for 14 years, beginning his lobbying career at the Little Regional Chamber of Commerce, where he served as vice president of Public Policy.

Hargraves has delivered impressive victories on his clients' behalf, including leading the lobbying effort to pass Arkansas' scope of practice legislation in 2016 and subsequent ballot initiative.

Johndra McNeely, O.D.

Dr. McNeely serves as South Carolina's legislative committee chair and spearheaded the effort to enact patient safety standards related to mobile clinics during the 2022 session. Dr. McNeely also played a critical role in enacting legislation, which helped to set national standards for patient safeguards, related to online vision tests in 2016.

Dr. McNeely currently serves as chair of the AOA's SGRC.

Jon Pederson, O.D.

Dr. Pederson served as co-legislative chair in Colorado, helping drive the efforts to pass expanded laser surgical privileges during the 2022 legislative session. He provided key testimony during the 2022 session and helped coordinate tactics on the ground at the state Capitol.

Dr. Pederson was named AOA's Optometrist of the Year at Optometry's Meeting this past summer and serves on AOA's SGRC.

Belinda Starkey, O.D.

Dr. Starkey has been an advocacy force to be reckoned with, since she first testified in committee during the Arkansas scope battle in 2019. She was a key member of the legislative team that not

only fought to enact advanced scope of practice legislation but then immediately turned around to successfully defend this new law in both the courts and at the ballot box simultaneously.

Dr. Starkey is a trustee on the AOA's Board of Trustees.

Leigh Ann Vanausdoll

As the CEO and lobbyist for the IOA, Leigh Ann has worked tirelessly to promote the interest of optometrists across the state. With over 20 years of experience in various legislative roles under Illinois Govs. Blagojevich and Quinn, Leigh Ann has utilized her expertise and been instrumental in passing significant eye care-related legislation, including tele-optometry in 2021, COVID-19 injection authority in 2022 and most recently the Vision Care Plan Regulation Act in 2023.

Vanausdoll received the 2023 AOA President's Award and Vision Monday's Most Influential Women in Optical Rising Star Award in 2020. She served as a member of the Taskforce on State Compact Licensure and is a current member of AOA's SGRC.

Jacquie M. Bowen, O.D.

Dr. Jacquie Bowen was a key member of the legislative team, which just successfully enacted advanced scope of practice legislation in her home state of Colorado earlier this year. She is also a past president of the Colorado Optometric Association (COA) and a legislative keyperson to Colorado.

Dr. Bowen was first elected to the AOA's Board of Trustees in 2016 and was just recently elected as vice president at Optometry's Meeting in June of this year.

John Buxie

John Buxie was a long-time Texas House staffer before starting his own public affairs firm and joining the Texas Optometric Association (TOA) as general counsel and director of government affairs.

John served as chief of staff to former Rep. Chris Paddie for 10 years, assisting with a wide range of committees, including Licensing and Administrative Procedures, Calendars, Transportation, and Land and Resource Management. John also served as the Committee Director for the Energy Resources and State Affairs Committees.

During this time, John shepherded over 30 sunset bills, including the Texas Medical Board, Alcoholic Beverage Commission, Department of Public Safety, and Behavioral Health Council, from inception to becoming law. He also worked on legislation which overhauled the state's electric grid, provided statewide regulation for transportation network companies and established permits for alcohol delivery companies.

A lifelong Texan, born and raised in San Antonio, John attended Southern Methodist University where he earned a BBA in Real Estate & Finance from the Cox School of Business (with Honors) and a JD from the Dedman School of Law. He was a business litigator in the Dallas metroplex before transitioning to politics full-time. John recently left state service and formed his own public affairs firm in addition to joining the TOA.

John and his wife, Mallory, are active members of Austin Ridge Bible Church and enjoy spending time with their daughter, Addison, and attempting to keep an active travel schedule with a 2-year-old.