

Dr. Bo Beddingfield, O.D.
President
Mississippi Optometric Association
141 Executive Drive, Suite 5
Madison, MS 39110

February 25, 2020

Dear Dr. Beddingfield,

We write to you today in **SUPPORT** of Doctors of Optometry practicing to their highest educational levels. Updating certain statutory provisions, while removing other unnecessary barriers in state law for Doctors of Optometry is critical in keeping up with the rigorous education and clinical training these primary eye and vision care providers receive today. Ultimately, these updates will maintain the necessary professional standards we've come to expect from our healthcare professionals; while providing greater access in the healthcare marketplace for patients to better receive the timely, qualified and often critical care they need.

Currently, 85% of primary eye care is provided by a Doctor of Optometry. With an aging population, the number of vision related problems in the U.S. are projected to increase by an astounding 65% in the coming years. Without updating the scope of practice for optometrists, 99.9% of the population with direct access to optometric vision care is denied access to routine high-quality care in your communities and must incur the added expense of referrals to specialists whose offices are often significant distances away and/or result in long wait times between office visits. This results in the unnecessary duplication of care and lost time from work, school and other daily obligations for families across the state.

In a report issued last June by Avalon Health Economics, it was projected that expanded optometric scope of practice nationally would result in an annual system wide savings of \$4.6 billion. Respectively, these figures represent a 20% increase in transaction savings and a nearly 15% increase in health outcomes savings per patient per year from only a modest projection of a 10% increase in access to care. Even then, study authors John Schneider, Ph.D., and Cara Scheibling note in their research summary these numbers are "likely an underestimate" without giving consideration to compounding factors, such as competition and a positive "multiplier effect" on local economies.

This recognition of healthcare marketplace competition and cost savings for Doctors of Optometry was also echoed in the U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services (HHS) Report from December of 2018, which stated "*...the United States health care system too often fails to deliver the value it should,*" *the authors write. "This report identifies barriers on the federal and state levels to market competition that stifle innovation, lead to higher prices, and do not incentivize improvements in quality."* The HHS report went on to say, "*States should consider changes to their scope of practice statutes to allow all health care providers to practice to the top of their license, utilizing their full skill set."*

Currently, four states-Alaska, Louisiana, Kentucky, and Oklahoma-permit ophthalmic surgical procedures, YAG laser capsulotomy and trabeculoplasty, under their scope of practice acts; with Arkansas recently becoming the fifth state in 2019. Taking this into account and stretching as far back as 1998 in the case of Oklahoma, there have been no malpractice judgements against optometrists related to these procedures or those proposed here.

These actualized cost savings, coupled with the lack of bad outcomes related to the comprehensive care Doctors of Optometry provide, support the overwhelming sentiment of public support seen for optometric scope expansion. As found in the Avalon Health Economics report cited above, 91% of Americans support laws which allow Doctors of Optometry to provide the full range of care they are trained to provide. The Avalon report also found 96% of Americans say assured access to eye health and vision care is an essential priority, second only to overall access to primary care (97%).

We strongly believe by offering greater competition in the healthcare marketplace with qualified providers (like Doctors of Optometry), this will ultimately best serve the eye and vision health of hard-working families in your state.

It is for the reasons listed above we support Doctors of Optometry practicing to their full educational authority.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration of this issue, please do not hesitate to contact us with any questions you might have.

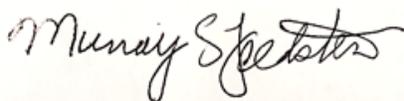
Sincerely,



Brent Gardner
Chief Government Affairs Officer
Americans for Prosperity



Naomi Lopez
Director of Healthcare Policy
Goldwater Institute



Dr. Murray Feldstein
Visiting Fellow
Goldwater Institute



Dr. Jameson Taylor
Vice President for Policy
Mississippi Center for Public Policy

Lorraine Jordan

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