

Dear Chair Prusak, Vice Chairs Salinas and Hayden and Members of the House Health Committee,

In response to HB 2541, I am writing to clarify the availability of ophthalmologic medical and surgical care in rural Oregon. I am a comprehensive ophthalmologist at Bay Eye Clinic in North Bend and have practiced here since 2003. The clinic was established in 1970 and has had up to 6 ophthalmologists serving the patients on the southern Oregon coast, from Brookings to Florence, continually since then. We provide a full range of medical, laser, and surgical management of eye diseases including cataracts, glaucoma, diabetes, and macular degeneration. We treat all ages, from newborns to the elderly. In fact, there are relatively few procedures that require a patient to travel to Eugene for care, for example.

Specifically, we routinely perform SLT glaucoma laser procedures, Yag laser capsulotomies, laser peripheral iridotomies, and retina laser procedures. If a patient were referred by an optometrist, they would be able to be seen within a month for a routine referral, and within 24 hours for urgent/emergent referrals. And when a patient has traveled a distance to see us, we offer to perform laser procedures such as Yag capsulotomies the same day for their convenience and because we recognize the value of restoring the patient's vision in a timely fashion.

I am also concerned that HB 2541 would remove the requirement for optometrists to consult with ophthalmologists in complex glaucoma cases. Even with the current requirement for consultation, I have seen many patients referred from optometrists for glaucoma management too late, when severe irreversible vision loss has already occurred, and surgical intervention is necessary to prevent further vision loss. I am concerned that loosening this requirement would result in more delayed referrals and more permanent vision loss from glaucoma.

Again, I would like to emphasize that patients on the southern Oregon coast have ready access to ophthalmologic care, both medical and surgical. Specifically, our rural population has access to trained ophthalmic surgeons who are equipped with the technical skills to perform delicate eye surgery, are skilled to know how to handle potential complications, and who also have the judgment to know when a procedure should not be performed.

Thank you for your consideration and for caring about patient safety, particularly in Oregon's rural areas.

Sincerely,

Jane Gilbert, MD
Bay Eye Clinic