

February 19, 2021

House Health Care Committee
Oregon House of Representatives
900 Court Street NE, H-489
Salem, Oregon, 97301

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

I am a board-certified ophthalmologist and faculty member at the Casey Eye Institute, Oregon Health & Science University. The purpose of this letter is to express my opposition to HB 2541, which poses a significant safety risk to Oregonians by expanding the scope of optometric practice. Patients' eyes and lives are at risk. There is no "simple" surgery on or around the eyes and no substitute for the extensive medical and surgical training ophthalmologists undergo to ensure safe patient care.

Ophthalmologists are medical doctors who complete rigorous training in general medicine as well as ophthalmology through medical school, internship, residency, and often fellowship training. There are strict national standards that all ophthalmologists meet to ensure quality care for the complex medical and surgical problems we evaluate and treat. There is no shortcut to achieving the clinical and surgical skills required for safe surgery involving the eye and its delicate periocular tissues and the management of complex and vision threatening eye conditions. Often, what is even more important than knowing how to perform the steps in a surgical or laser procedure is knowing when a procedure is indicated, when it should not be performed, and how to manage the inevitable complications that occur even in the best of hands. Unfortunately, clinical errors in eye care can lead to irreversible damage. Vision loss is known to affect quality of life, independence, mobility, as well as mental and physical health. In addition, some conditions we evaluate and treat as ophthalmologists are life-threatening themselves.

Proponents of this bill argue that access to care will be improved for Oregonians. However, more than 92% of Oregonians live within 30 minutes of an ophthalmologist. While access to care is important, the quality of care being delivered is equally, if not more, important. I enjoy a collaborative relationship with optometrists and ophthalmologist throughout the state in my role as a subspecialist in ocular oncology. I treat cancers and other tumors that develop in the eye, many of which are both vision and life threatening. As the only practicing ocular oncologist in the state, patients often need to travel a distance to see me, however this is both reasonable and preferred due to the complex and specialized nature of the care I deliver. Patients understand and accept this and are very appreciative of the care despite the travel distance. Similarly, when fully informed regarding the differences in training and experience, I expect patients would prefer to travel a bit further and wait a bit longer to see a highly trained ophthalmologist for surgery rather than trust their vision to an optometrist for a laser or surgical procedure or for management of a complex eye condition like advanced glaucoma.

Optometrists provide great value to the care of Oregonians working in collaboration with ophthalmologists. I acknowledge and recognize their importance as primary eye care providers and count many optometrists as personal friends. However, HB 2541 needlessly places patient eye safety at risk by allowing optometrists to perform ophthalmic surgery, including eyelid surgeries, refractive surgeries, surgeries involving needles, puncture of the cornea, and allowing the use of multiple modalities such as scalpels, lasers, needles, ultrasound, ionizing radiation and burning and freezing tissue. It would also likely allow optometrists to potentially perform hundreds of different types of eye surgeries because of the way it is drafted, including treatment for cancers in and around the eye. This is

truly alarming. HB 2541 is not a "limited" surgery bill restricted to a "few uncomplicated" eye surgeries. The fact that optometrists, who are not surgeons, would be allowed to perform all the surgeries authorized in this bill without ever having completed medical school and surgical residency is alarming and places all Oregonians at risk.

Please consider the care you would wish for your family members and extend this consideration to your constituents. I urge you to vote NO on HB 2541.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A. Skalet', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Alison Skalet, MD PhD