

Submitter: Michelle Monkman
On Behalf Of: Oregon rural Optometrists
Committee: House Committee On Behavioral Health and Health Care
Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB2204

I am an optometric physician practicing in Oregon and I am reaching out to ask for your support in the passage of HB 2204. The bill removes the requirement that optometric physicians have hospital consulting privileges in order to qualify for a rural tax credit.

To compete with more populated areas in acquiring physicians, rural communities rely upon financial incentives such as tax credits and student loan forgiveness. My son and daughter in law graduated from Optometry school in May of 2024 and are trying to open a practice in Pendleton. They came out of school with a combined \$600k in debt. Opening a practice in a rural area takes another \$300k conservatively. Those are not numbers that attract very many practitioners to rural areas. Financial help is imperative if we want to serve everyone in our community in a timely and high quality manner.

To function as intended, tax credits must be easily accessible. The requirement to have a hospital affiliation is an unnecessary barrier to many optometric physicians in rural communities. The credentialing process is arduous. It can take months or even years for small rural hospitals to establish criteria for new providers, and they often have little or no motivation to do so.

We support expanding access to rural healthcare and HB 2204 is a positive step forward. Thank you for your support!