

Submitter: Jessica Tegen

On Behalf Of:

Committee: House Committee On Behavioral Health and Health Care

Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB2204

I have the great privilege of providing eye care as an optometric physician to rural Madras, Oregon, and it's surrounding communities. Some of my patients travel beyond three hours to receive care from my clinic. Those of us who do practice rural optometry in Oregon provide a great deal of medical eye care, including care for diabetic eye disease, glaucoma, macular degeneration, and all kinds of eye emergencies. At this time, my practice is extremely busy, and I have difficulty managing my patient load. I have been trying to attract a long term associate doctor to assist with patient care for four years with no success. Potential associate doctors that I have spoken to are always asking about student loan forgiveness or payment as part of an employment package. I cannot afford to pay student loans for a doctor I hire. I am still paying my student loans from 2007 when I graduated from optometry school! In order to provide access to care for patients in our rural communities, it is critical that we continue to create financial incentives for these new doctors. It's a bit silly that I would need to get hospital privileges in order to have a tax benefit. My office is less than two miles from the hospital in Madras, and all of the local physicians have my personal cell phone number and know how to coordinate care with me for emergency eye care. Nevertheless, I attempted to apply for hospital privileges when I started practice in Madras so I could take advantage of the rural tax credit. Unfortunately, our hospital is also part of a "family" of hospitals known as St. Charles, and as such is not considered a "rural" hospital because their parent hospital is in a non-rural location, which is over an hour away from Madras, in Bend. So all these stipulations for rural tax credits are ridiculous. A tax credit would be so beneficial to my small business. I pride myself on providing the most up to date technology and care for my patients, and the cost of medical equipment, which becomes outdated quickly, continues to rise. It is imperative that I bring on new associate doctors to my clinic in the very near future to meet patient demands, and to run the clinic someday when I retire, or if I become unable to provide care. I strongly urge you to support the passage of HB 2204. Sincerely, Jessica Tegen, OD