

Departments of Ophthalmology

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February 25, 2016

The Honorable Pamela Althoff
Illinois State Senate
309L State Capitol
Springfield, IL 62706

The Honorable Anna Moeller
Illinois House of Representatives
249-E Stratton Office Building
Springfield, IL 62706

Re: SB 2899 and HB 6166 - Optometry Practice Act

Dear Senator Althoff and Representative Moeller:

We are the chairs of the Departments of Ophthalmology residency programs in Illinois. In this role, we oversee the training of eye physicians and surgeons. Bills introduced this session (HB 6166 and SB 2899) would allow optometrists – who are not medical doctors and are not trained to do any surgery – to perform eye surgery and to give injections, including in and around the eye.

This proposal alarms us greatly. For the safety of the citizens of Illinois, eye surgery should be performed by eye surgeons. We respectfully ask that the surgery and injections provisions be removed from this proposed legislation.

Ophthalmology residents already are medical doctors when they begin their residency training with us. They meet rigorous standards to become ophthalmologists involving management of thousands of patients with significant eye diseases, and they perform hundreds of surgical procedures under supervision of attending physician faculty. This experience prepares the graduating ophthalmologist to properly diagnose a patient's condition, to understand the risks and benefits of treatment – including surgical intervention – and to manage any complications or unintended outcomes that may result.

Our residents complete three years of hands-on training after their four years of medical school and a year of medical internship. Their five years of basic medical training is an essential factor upon which their ophthalmology residency depends. Positions in our programs are very competitive. Residents admitted typically are at the top of their medical school graduating class.

It simply is not possible to learn how to perform any surgery – even so-call "minor" procedures – by observing somebody else. There are many subtle factors that come into play when considering surgical treatment of an eye condition, as well as giving injections around the eye. Developing the skill to safely provide these treatments takes a lot of practice. An additional concern is that cancers may sometimes masquerade as eyelid lesions like chalazion (styes). The ability to distinguish between benign and malignant lesions of the eyelid takes years of study and is not something that can be learned in a short course. Malignant lesions of the eyelid can spread throughout the body and cause death if not diagnosed early and managed correctly.

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No patients in our state are demanding surgery by an optometrist. Illinois citizens depend on the General Assembly and state regulators to protect their health and welfare. Medical care is already confusing enough; don't blur the lines of surgery by allowing untrained people to operate.

It's your eyes...vision is precious. We urge you to protect the people of Illinois and remove provisions from HB 6166 and SB 2899 which would allow non-physician optometrists to perform eye surgery and give injections around the eye.

Sincerely,



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