

April 15, 2016

The Alaska State Senate
Senate Finance Committee
State Capitol, Room 532
Juneau, AK 99801

RE: Oppose SB 55, An Act Relating to the Practice of Optometry

Honorable Members of the Senate Finance Committee:

On behalf of the American Society of Plastic Surgeons (ASPS) and the Northwest Society of Plastic Surgeons (NWSPS), we urge you to oppose Alaska Senate Bill 55, which would expand the scope of practice for optometrists beyond their professional training. As surgeons, we encourage you to maintain the high level of patient care that has been established and maintain current standards that permit only licensed Medical Doctors (MD) or Doctors of Osteopathic Medicine (DO) who meet appropriate education, training and professional standards to perform surgery in the ocular region.

If passed, SB 55 would allow non-physician optometrists to perform surgical procedures on the face. This includes complex procedures that fall squarely within the practice of medicine. These procedures are not “not invasive” as the bill describes them. Allowing optometrists to practice medicine without the requisite medical school and residency training would jeopardize patient safety and lower the standard of surgical care in the state.

SB 55 also gives optometrists the authority to use a wide range of pharmaceuticals that require a fundamental and systematic medical understanding of the human body. This understanding is gained through the clinical and educational rigor of a physician’s training. Physicians are uniquely qualified to treat patients in the rare instance when an allergic reaction or some other life-threatening complication arises when these drugs are administered. Optometrists do not receive the same education and training ophthalmologists and plastic surgeons receive. Ophthalmologists and plastic surgeons must attain a core medical and surgical education while completing seven to ten years of training, which includes increasing responsibility and decision-making authority in the hospital setting. Optometrists only complete four to five years of education with significantly less clinical exposure and responsibility.

Due to patient safety issues, such as the possibility of complications arising from surgery, it is critical that such procedures are performed by physician surgeons who have the comprehensive training and board certification to handle those complications when they do occur. We urge you

to **OPPOSE** Senate Bill 55 in order to protect the high standard of patient safety in Alaska. If you have any questions or need further assistance, please feel free to contact Patrick Hermes, Senior Manager of Government Affairs and Advocacy at phermes@plasticsurgery.org.

Sincerely,

Craig Birgfeld, MD, FACS
President, Northwest Society of Plastic Surgeons

David Song, MD, MBA
President, American Society of Plastic Surgeons