

March 9, 2016

Dear Chairwoman Costello,

I have been a resident of this state since 1978, and a constituent of Senate District K since 1987. I have actively practiced law in this state since 1981.

I am writing to request that you and your fellow committee members support SB 55. This bill ends the decades long discrimination that Optometric Physicians have labored under compared to other licensed health care professionals such as dentists, medical doctors, and nurses--each of whom are governed by their own boards. It would also unburden the legislature from oversight of medical, pharmaceutical and technology advances and issues related to the practice of optometry over which the legislature has no special expertise.

The only opposition to this bill of which I am aware, is the same opposition that has been raised to every single previous legislative authorization that has merely permitted optometrists to safely practice with the scope of their special training and expertise. That opposition is the apocalyptic fear mongering of ophthalmologists, who in the guise of public safety are merely "protecting turf", by substantially and unnecessarily increasing the cost of primary eye care to the citizens of this state. One only need examine the legislature history of previous bills which finally allowed Optometrists to use diagnostic drugs (such as dilation drugs for eye examinations), and years later, therapeutic drugs (such as topical antibiotics to treat pink eye). In each case the ophthalmologists came out in force to oppose these bills, claiming public safety would be sacrificed. In each case, Alaska merely did what most of the country had already done, and experienced the exact same result--safe, effective, local primary eye care by Optometrists, at massively lower prices than had the same service been provided by ophthalmologists.

Please perceive the sole opposition to this bill for what it is: a naked effort to restrain trade at the expense of the citizens of Alaska. SB 55 will give Alaska citizens the best access to affordable eye care with over 150 optometrists providing the majority of care (compared to only 20 ophthalmologists) in all settings, from urban Anchorage to Alaskan villages.

If the claims of ophthalmologists held an inkling of truth, Optometrists would not have the lowest malpractice insurance rates in healthcare. That fact illustrates the good clinical and professional judgement that Optometrists have exercised for decades. Again, I urge your support of SB 55 for the sake of all Alaskans, except perhaps, for a few ophthalmologists.

Sincerely,

Dave Schmid

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