

March 16, 2015

Dear Honorable Members of the Health and Social Services Committee,

My name is Forrest Messerschmidt. I have been a member of the Optometric community, practicing in Juneau for 26 years. I am currently a member of the Alaska Board of Optometry and am writing to ask for you to please support SB 55.

This bill updates the Alaska Optometry statutes in several areas, making it similar to the dental and nurse practitioner statutes, whereas the board determines the regulatory details of practice. This allows more flexibility as technology advances.

It places the details of the continuing education requirements back into regulation where they belong, as the Department indicated they desired many years ago. Current regulations already require 36 hours per license period, and the deleted hours shown are redundant and require unnecessary work for Occupational Licensing.

SB 55 leaves the details of the current pharmaceutical prescribing authority up to the board through regulation, as with the other prescribing professions. But the bill does clearly prohibit injections into the vitreous body of the eye, which is done by specialty ophthalmologists.

SB 55 re-writes the optometry definition which is currently over 40 years old. Optometrists are trained to perform far more advanced procedures than many years ago. The new definition clearly defines modern optometry, and allows the board the flexibility to assure protection of the public. And there is a section on limitations on practice which excludes any invasive surgery, and a section clearly defining all the excluded surgery reserved for ophthalmology, including laser PRK, even though many optometrists can perform this in a few other states, it is still prohibited in SB 55.

Thank you for your time,

Forrest Messerschmidt, OD

Member, Alaska Board of Optometry