

March 28, 2016

Senator Costello,

I read with interest an article opposing SB 55 written by an Anchorage ophthalmologist published in Alaska Dispatch News on March 14, 2016. I attended The Ohio State University College of Optometry from 2001-2005, as did another Alaskan optometrist, Kathleen Rice, before each of us went on to complete post-graduate residencies and board certification. Right next door at Ohio State College of Medicine from 2001-2005 was the author of the article. While there were multiple inaccuracies in the article such as the implication that ophthalmologists manage all of their own surgical complications (they don't, and the Hippocratic oath states "nor will I fail to call in my colleagues when the skills of another are needed for a patient's recovery"), I found the author's statement that optometrists have "far less medical education and clinical training" to be particularly suspicious due to direct overlap between both her curriculum/instructors at Ohio State and mine. The article goes on to question optometrists' ability to prescribe pharmaceuticals, something the profession has a track record of doing safely for roughly 40 years. Of particular note, her Ohio State College of Medicine and my College of Optometry had direct overlap in pharmacology instruction and more.

The shared professors and curriculum between Ohio State optometry and medicine that immediately came to mind included pharmacology classes, instructors such as Dr. Popat Patil, medical school professor of the year Dr. Richard Fertel (see attached bio referencing this curriculum overlap), Dr. Steve Katz, and several others. We had several of the SAME professors.

While there is overlap between our education and patient care, optometry is historically a distinct and separate profession from medicine. Optometry as an organized profession prides itself on providing over 100 years of the highest caliber eye care through quality education and continuously expanding knowledge, research, and clinical skill. It is unfortunate that this has been perceived as a threat by certain other professionals who have appeared to be more interested in protecting what they see as theirs than allowing a parallel profession of different historical basis to provide the needed, quality, and life-enhancing vision and eye care that OPTOMETRISTS within Alaska provide each and every day to more patients in more places. Optometry offers affordability, efficiency, and access that is unparalleled; please support this through SB 55.

Sincerely,
David Karpik, OD