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Sponsor Statement for HB 245 Optometrist Licensure

HB 245 makes some necessary changes to the licensure criteria for optometrists in this state.

Currently, Alaska has three levels of licensure for optometrists:

- 1.) Basic License (no pharmaceuticals)
- 2.) License with Pharmaceutical Endorsement (in-office eye drops)
- 3.) License with Pharmaceutical Prescription and Use Endorsement (prescribing authority).

The Board of Optometry would like to have a standard level of care that everyone receives from optometrists. Therefore, some adjustments need to be made in statute to require the highest level of care.

HB 245 brings Alaska statutes in line with current educational levels. Students graduating from optometry schools within the last five years have already received the level of education necessary to obtain a license at the highest level currently provided in Alaska. Further, most licensed optometrists in Alaska have already obtained the level of education necessary for the highest level of licensure. There are only a handful of people who have not received that education and most of these optometrists are nearing retirement age. These optometrists would be issued a restricted license which would allow them to continue to practice but still not allow them to provide services that go beyond their level of education.

The level of education required in HB 245 has been standard in most optometrist schools across the country and most older optometrists have already obtained this level of education on their own. Many states are currently working on or have already passed similar legislation. Our citizens deserve the most current and highest level of care possible; allowing the licensure of optometrists with less than the standard education levels puts our citizens at risk. HB 245 remedies this problem by standardizing the licensure requirements for optometrists in Alaska.

I urge your support of HB 245.