



Dear Alaska Representatives and Senators,

What car do you drive? Do the manufacturers of automobiles set the safety standards for their vehicles? The answer is unequivocally no. It is the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. Should the manufacturers be allowed to set their own standards? House Bill 103 and Senate Bill 36 are bills in which the Optometry Board of our state are seeking to set their own safety standards and wholly control their future scope of practice in Alaska. Currently, you as our legislature, are the independent authority to set the safety standards for the practice of Optometry and whether their scope of practice meets the standard of safety for any advances in medical or surgical interventions.

Who sets the standards of safety in the inclusive medical and surgical scope of practice for Ophthalmology-- those of us who spent four years in medical school in order to have the privilege of practicing medicine and four additional years of a specialized residency program to practice the skills of eye medicine and surgery? It is not the Alaska State Ophthalmology Society. The safety standards that we must meet to practice our specialty started with each of our medical schools that had to meet specific accreditation standards. Our residencies had to meet the standards set by the national Residency Review Committee. We had to pass our comprehensive national medical board written and oral examinations and must recertify every ten years. We have to meet the standards of our Alaska State Medical Board and in every institution in which we care for patients we must meet their standards as well with credentialing every two years in which we are reviewed to meet an appropriate standard for the practice of our specialty and for the surgical procedures for which we have requested privileges. We are not alone. Every other medical and surgical specialist in our state has similar requirements to include Podiatrists who fall under the Medical Board and Maxillofacial Surgeons who fall under the Dental Board. Medical specialists who have already completed medical residencies to practice such specialties as pediatrics, family medicine, emergency medicine or internal medicine must still complete a surgical or surgical subspecialty residency if they wish to increase their scope of practice into surgery or to perform certain invasive procedures. Podiatrists must undergo a three year surgical residency in order to extend their practice to surgery of the foot and Dentists must complete at least a four year surgical residency in order to become a Maxillofacial surgeon. These are the safety standards set nationwide.

Optometrists who have completed a four year doctorate program are a valuable part of ocular care for Alaskans and are critical. They are the frontline of healthcare just like our other primary care practitioners and just like all of the rest of us who practice medicine, they should meet the safety standards that have been set for the rest of us. You must decide who will create that safety standard. Fellow Alaskans are safer today

due to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration and I hope that they will remain at the safest levels in their eye care because of your thoughtfulness.

Should you have any question concerning this topic I am available via cell phone at 907-350-4394.

Regards,

R. Kevin Winkle, M.D.
Pediatric Ophthalmology
and Adult Strabismus