

Dear Alaska State Senators,

In short summary, I am writing to ask you to **please oppose HB 103**. It is misleading, and not in the best interest of patients here in Alaska.

Please allow me to expand a little. I am an ophthalmologist in Fairbanks, Alaska. Having spent most of my youth in Alaska, and graduating from Lathrop High School in Fairbanks, I am glad to be back in Alaska and taking care of patients in this great state.

One thing that has proven itself time and again in talking with my patients, is how much they value their eyesight. Additionally, the appearance of their eyes and eyelids, and the protection of their future eyesight, are critical to them. While many of them could not tell you the difference between an optometrist and an ophthalmologist if asked, they are relying on you to do what is best to establish and maintain laws that are in their best interest and align with their deep desire to preserve and protect their vision. Thank you for the work you do and for shouldering this burden on their behalf.

I am not against the creation of an independent board that oversees optometrists and the practice of optometry here in Alaska, such would seem reasonable. However, it would seem to me to be moving beyond reasonable, and not in the best interest of Alaskans, to then allow that board to approve optometrists in this state to do things such as surgical and laser procedures, as defined in the bill as ophthalmic surgery, that they are not trained to do, have not been doing up to this point, and are not considered part of the practice and scope of optometry. While I applaud the definition of surgery in the bill, the wording still gives the optometry board the ability to approve whatever they feel their members are qualified to do, including ophthalmic surgery. The use of the word "unless" after the phrase "A licensee may not perform ophthalmic surgery" grants the board that power.

There is a path, already defined and accepted, for any person to be a candidate for taking on the rights and responsibilities to perform ophthalmic surgery - to complete medical school followed by completion of ophthalmology residency. This path is an intensive, long, and involved pursuit to gain the knowledge and ability to perform surgery/lasers on such a critical and highly valued, intricate, small, and often delicate part of the body. Why is this bill seeking to change that path? Surely such a change would not be in the best interest of Alaskans who seek to preserve and protect their vision.

I strongly advise voting against HB 103, or insisting that it be changed to remove the "unless" clause discussed above.

Thank you for your time and service. I am happy to answer any questions and can be reached by email, phone (907-371-5613), or text.

Sincerely,

Stanley Fuller MD
Fairbanks