

Jody Simpson

no

From: David Swanson <r3t1na@yahoo.com>
Sent: Wednesday, February 01, 2017 10:33 AM
To: Sen. David Wilson
Subject: Senate Bill 36

1/30/17

Dear Senator Wilson,

(This is a copy of the letter I'm sending to the other committee members. It a little different from the one I faxed to you. Thanks for reading.)

I am writing about SB 36, the bill that gives the Board of Optometry full authority to define the scope of Optometric practice in Alaska. This letter will give you my personal perspective on why it is so important.

SB 36 explicitly invests in the Board of Optometry the authority to describe without limit other than the whim of the Board "the scope of practice for a licensee to perform ophthalmic surgery and noninvasive procedures". Optometrists are very talented professionals, but their schools do not provide surgical training and, frankly, make no pretense of doing so.

Let me give you an example of how a "simple operation" of removing a benign looking spot from an eyelid can affect a person's life. My wife, a retired Family Doctor, had a such a spot on her lower eyelid. She asked me, an ophthalmic retina surgeon, to remove it for her. We two doctors both thought it was "nothing" and would be easy to remove, but fortunately, I sent her to Robin Grendahl, MD, who because of her experience and training recognized the potential seriousness, biopsied the lesion, and found it to be an invasive type of skin cancer. Because it was diagnosed early while small and localized, successful excision of the tumor and eyelid reconstruction was possible, and my wife is cured. She still looks good, too. Experience really does make a difference.

Surgeons in America undergo an "extreme vetting" process that begins with college, continues in medical school, and is finalized by a multi-year apprenticeship under the tutelage of senior surgeons with expertise in their field. It is a privilege bestowed upon people who meet the standards set by society to protect the general welfare of the community. These standards exist for very good reasons and potentially affect all of us a personal level.

As you contemplate the ramifications of SB 36, please also contemplate the responsibility entrusted in you by the people who elected you. Think of the kind of professional you would choose to operate on your family and choose the same for all Alaskans.

Sincerely,

David Swanson, MD
Alaska Retinal Consultants
Anchorage

*THIS FAX MAY CONTAIN CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION. IF RECEIVED IN ERROR,
PLEASE DESTROY AND NOTIFY SENDER. THANK YOU*

**Matthew G. Guess, M.D. Scott A. Limstrom, M.D.
David E. Swanson, M.D. David S. Zumbro, M.D.**

**ALASKA RETINAL CONSULTANTS
3500 LATOUCHE, SUITE 250
ANCHORAGE, ALASKA 99508
PHONE: 907-561-1530 FAX: 907-561-2611**

Date: February 1, 2017

To: Senator David Wilson

Fax: 907-376-6180

Re: SB 36

Please forward to Senator Wilson.

Thank you

MATTHEW G. GUESS, MD SCOTT A. LIMSTROM, MD DAVID E. SWANSON, MD DAVID S. ZUMBRO, MD

ALASKA RETINAL CONSULTANTS

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Date: January 30, 2017

To: Senator David Wilson
Chairman, Health & Social Services Committee
State Capitol Building, Room 115
Juneau, AK 99801

Re: Senate Bill 36

Dear Senator Wilson:

I'm writing you this letter in regard to SB 36 relating to the practice of optometry in the State of Alaska. This bill gives the Board of Optometry sole and full authority to allow optometrists to perform surgery for which they have received no formal training.

I am a board certified ophthalmologist who has been practicing in Alaska since 2009. In 2014, I found myself in a similar situation that the optometrists now find themselves in. I was interested in performing specific treatments of diseases of the eye related to the retina, which would include injections of medications into the eye and laser treatments of the eye. I had been performing cataract surgery and other medical and surgical treatment of eye diseases, but I did not feel comfortable with my level of training for that level of care. I chose to apply to and was accepted into a two-year vitreoretinal surgery fellowship, which required moving myself and my family to Ohio for two years. During my two years in Ohio between 2014 and 2016, I worked an average of 60 hours a week including nights and weekends to become a more skilled practitioner and surgeon. After this intensive two years of training, I returned to Alaska in August 2016 to be able to provide the level of care that I felt like residents of the State of Alaska deserved.

This proposed Senate Bill 36 circumvents the training that I and many of my colleagues have chosen to undergo to provide a high level of safe and skilled care for the eye diseases we see in our clinic on a daily basis. Hopefully, you will agree that providing that high quality eye care to Alaskans is of utmost importance and that Senate Bill 36 does not help accomplish this goal.

In summary, I feel that Senate Bill 36 should be rejected in that it is expansive and overreaching in the potential allowance of optometry scope of practice. There is no substitute for the extensive training that I have received to allow me to correctly diagnose, manage, and treat complex eye diseases. Thank you for your consideration in this matter.

Sincerely,



Matthew G. Guess, M.D.

MGG/mt

no

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January 30, 2017

Senator David Wilson, Chairman
Health & Social Services Committee
State Capitol Room 115
Juneau AK, 99801

Dear Senator Wilson,

It is with disappointment and frustration that I find myself composing another letter regarding yet another Optometrist scope of practice expansion bill. You should know that I have absolutely no problem with the idea that Alaska Optometrists should have a state board and govern themselves. The problem with Senate Bill 36 is that the definition of optometry is dangerously incorrect. It is dangerous because it incorrectly uses the practice of ophthalmology in the definition of optometry. Optometrists are not trained in the practice of ophthalmology and they should not be granted the ability to practice ophthalmology without the proper training.

Optometrists consider themselves to be the "primary care" for eyes. In Alaska, they perform this task extraordinarily well. Optometry is defined as the practice of examining eyes for disease conditions, initiating treatment for common diseases such as glaucoma, and ensuring that the patient is in the correct spectacle or contact lens prescription. If a complex or surgical eye condition is identified, the patient is referred to a qualified eye physician and surgeon (ophthalmologist) for further diagnosis and treatment.

Ophthalmology is very different from optometry. Ophthalmologists are trained to identify disease conditions and treat with medicine or surgical procedures when appropriate. Senate Bill 36 asks for Optometrists to govern themselves in the practice of optometry but blatantly uses ophthalmology procedures and practice in the definition of optometry. This bill blurs that difference in a manner that is purposefully misleading and unsafe for patients in Alaska.

To become an ophthalmologist, one must complete a 4 year undergraduate degree, 4 years of medical school and then 4 years of residency training plus up to 2 years of fellowship training. In total, it takes up to 14 years after graduating high school to become an ophthalmologist with up to 6 of those years being dedicated to intense surgical training. In Alaska, there are 26 ophthalmologists and all of us have completed this pathway. During the course of this training, the individual learns how to be a surgeon. Being a good surgeon requires more skill than using instruments or energy sources such as laser to alter tissues for therapeutic or diagnostic purposes. Ethical surgeons learn when to do a procedure and when to simply observe the patient. They learn that the phrase "first do no harm" requires careful consideration

1/30/17

Senator David Wilson, Chairman
Health and Social Services Committee
Fax: 907-465-3265

Dear Senator Wilson,

Congratulations on your recent election to the Alaska State Senate. No doubt you will find your new responsibilities challenging and rewarding.

I am writing about SB 36, the bill that gives the Board of Optometry full authority to define the scope of Optometric practice in Alaska. You have received, and hopefully have read, multiple letters from my Ophthalmology colleagues outlining the reasons why actual eye surgeons in Alaska believe this is a bad bill. There is no reason to reiterate all of their arguments.

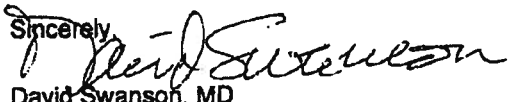
I have spent the last 24 years taking care of individual Alaskans with serious eye diseases, diabetes, and injuries, yet in the next few weeks, your decision whether to table or release SB 36 from your Committee may have a greater impact on eye health in our State than all my years of work.

SB 36 explicitly invests the Board of Optometry the authority to describe without limit other than the whim of the Board "the scope of practice for a licensee to perform ophthalmic surgery and noninvasive procedures". Optometrists are very talented professionals, but their schools do not provide surgical training. Legislation that allows the Board of Optometry to re-define their profession as surgical does not make it so.

Surgeons in America undergo a vetting process that begins with college, continues in medical school, and is finalized by a multi-year apprenticeship under the tutelage of senior surgeons with expertise in their field. It is a privilege that is earned by meeting the standards set by society to protect the welfare of the community. It is bad public policy to circumvent this process by legislative fiat. Would an association of airline stewards be granted the authority to set the standards by which airline stewards can fly the plane?

As you contemplate the ramifications of SB 36, please also contemplate the responsibility entrusted in you by the people of Wasilla. Think of the kind of professional you would choose to operate on your family and choose the same for all Alaskans. As you say on your webpage, "it is just about doing the right thing".

Sincerely,


David Swanson, MD
Alaska Retinal Consultants
Anchorage

January 29th, 2017

no

Senator David Wilson, Chairman
Health and Social Services Committee
State Capitol, room 115

Dear Senator Wilson,

My name is Scott Limstrom. I'm an Ophthalmologist specializing in diseases and surgery of the retina and vitreous. I have practiced in Alaska for over 20 years. My practice has included travel to many parts of rural Alaska. For many years I practiced in Wasilla. I am currently a partner at Alaska Retinal Consultants, a practice based in Anchorage. Our practice treats many sight-threatening diseases, which involves microscopic surgery to delicate structures within the eye.

I am writing to you to express grave concern over senate bill 36. This bill would give the board of Optometry sole authority to determine which invasive diagnostic and surgical procedures Optometrists may perform. Optometrists provide an invaluable service to the residents of the state of Alaska. It's important to understand that Optometrists are not medical doctors, and do not undergo the rigorous education needed to perform surgery of the eye. The board of Optometry in the state of Alaska consists of 4 Optometrists and 1 layperson. There is no medical doctor, no surgeon on the board. As SB 36 is written, Optometrists and a layperson, none of whom are surgeons or medical doctors, will make the decision on what is required for Optometrists to perform surgery. Kind of sounds like the fox guarding the chicken coop to me.

Ophthalmologists, along with all medical doctors, are overseen by a diverse board of medical examiners. Before we can practice medicine and surgery, we undergo extensive vetting through licensing overseen by the board of medical examiners in addition to careful privileging through the hospitals and surgery centers where we operate. The privilege to care for the sight of patients is not to be taken lightly.

For the past 20 years, I have been privileged to care for the sight of tens of thousands of patients in this great state. Hardly a year has gone by where we haven't had some sort of Optometric bill before the legislature. In the interest of patient safety, please vote no on SB 36.

Sincerely,

Scott Limstrom, MD
President of the Alaska Society of Eye Physicians and Surgeons
Partner, Alaska Retinal Consultants