

I am a retina surgeon practicing at UVM very concerned about S.64, the bill that would expand the scope of practice of Vermont optometrists. I testified before the Senate Committee on Health and Welfare earlier this year about the lack of any real-world outcome data on the safety or effectiveness of any of these procedures when performed by US optometrists. I remain concerned that allowing optometrists, whose training does not adequately prepare them for laser and scalpel surgery is a bad move for Vermonters: my patients, my friends and my family. Moreover, it remains unclear to me, based on the initial OPR report and my practice experience here over the past decade, that there is a need for this expansion; that it would expand access to care, or save Vermont money.

I understand that there is support for this bill as written. The amendment proposed by Rep Stone seems like a commonsense step in the right direction to protect Vermonters and one of their most precious health assets: their vision.

If, based on all the testimony you have heard, and consideration you have given the matter, you feel that it is safe and appropriate to allow optometrists to perform surgery on your constituents, I would urge you and the Government Operation Committee to strongly consider Rep Stone's amendments to try to increase the margin of safety.

I think all the amendments proposed are equally valuable, but to keep it short, the amendment I would personally like to highlight is the requirement to increase the number of precepted cases from 2 to 12, and increasing the required supervised education hours from 8 to 18. In my heart, I feel these training numbers are still quite small, and that the extensive lecture and lab exposure described in optometry testimony is no substitute for experience with real people, but more real world experience is certainly better, and might help prevent some complications in Vermonters. Removing lasers from the bill is a no-brainer to me, as I testified in Senate Health and Welfare. Having the Board of Medical Practice oversee this advanced licensure seems rational and in line with other invasive procedures.

I thank you very much for your consideration of this very complex matter and I would be happy to expand on any of these points (or the other proposed amendments) if you feel that could be helpful.

Sincerely,

Chris Brad