

Dear Members of the Vermont Legislature,

My name is Dr. Daniel Phillips, OD. I am an optometrist practicing in St. Albans and Vice President of the Vermont Optometric Association. I am writing to highlight how Vermont's current scope-of-practice restrictions create significant access barriers for patients in rural communities—particularly through excessive travel and lost personal time.

In Franklin County, I regularly treat patients who need minor, low-risk eye procedures that I am trained and experienced to perform but am prohibited from providing under current law. As a result, these patients must travel outside their communities—most often to Burlington—for care that could otherwise be delivered locally and promptly.

For rural patients, this travel is not a minor inconvenience. A single referral can mean an hour or more each way on the road, time off from work, arranging childcare, securing transportation, or relying on family members or caregivers. For elderly patients, those with limited mobility, or those without reliable vehicles, these trips are especially difficult and sometimes lead to postponed or forgone care.

Compounding this burden are long wait times. Even after patients make the trip, appointments for these procedures often require weeks or months of waiting. What should be a short, local visit instead becomes a full-day—or multi-day—commitment involving repeated travel, missed work, and added expense. The cumulative impact on rural families' time and resources is substantial.

These access challenges are not the result of safety concerns or lack of training. In many other rural states, optometrists are permitted to perform these same procedures with strong safety outcomes. Vermont optometrists receive comparable education and clinical training, but current law prevents rural patients from benefiting from that care close to home.

Modernizing Vermont's optometric scope of practice through S.64 would immediately reduce travel burdens, shorten wait times, and allow patients in rural districts to receive timely care within their own communities. This is a practical, patient-centered solution that respects both the value of Vermonters' time and the realities of rural healthcare access.

Thank you for your consideration and for your focus on improving access to care for rural Vermonters.

Sincerely,
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