

To the members of the Vermont House Government Operations Committee:

I am an ophthalmologist living in Colchester, and have worked at UVM Medical Center since 2005. I support the Stone Amendment to optometry bill S.64. I do the laser procedures which optometrists would like to perform on Vermont patients, and have strong reservations about the bill being passed as written. While YAG laser capsulotomy procedures are often required for patients who have undergone cataract surgery, patient selection for the procedure is critical. Patients have been referred to me for the procedure by their optometrists, who would have been at high risk of complications had the procedure been done. One example of this is a patient with 'zonular instability' who would have been at high risk of dislocation of the intraocular lens into the back of the eye with the procedure, resulting in blindness in the eye until another surgery had been done to remove the vitreous gel from the back of the eye and reposition the lens implant. Another patient was referred to me by an optometrist for YAG laser capsulotomy who did not actually have a 'film' behind the lens implant at all - a laser procedure for this patient to remove an opacity on the lens implant itself would certainly have resulted in damage to the implant, which could have resulted in loss of vision and a need to remove and replace the lens implant (a lengthy and technically difficult procedure with significant risk of surgical complications). Even with 'routine' laser procedures, problems such as macular edema (swelling in the back of the eye), retinal tears or persistent eye inflammation occasionally occur, resulting in loss of vision, expert care, and need for additional procedures. These procedures are best done by ophthalmologists, whose training allows them to perform these procedures for Vermonters in the safest way possible.

I also support the other provisions of the amendment, requiring additional training for anyone planning to do these procedures in Vermont, and requiring oversight by the Vermont Board of Medical Practice.

I do think the amendment is imperative to ensure the safety of Vermonters, and appreciate the work of your committee to this end.

Respectfully,
Stephen Pecsényi MD
UVM Medical Center Ophthalmology