

I urge you to vote No on S.64, a bill that would radically redefine the work of optometrists.

I have worked as an ophthalmologist in Vermont for almost twenty years. I also teach ophthalmology at our medical school.

Although optometrists are called “eye doctors,” they are not “medical doctors.” Medical doctors attend medical school and residency, a decade of training in medical and surgical expertise. By comparison, optometrists receive no training to perform surgery. S.64 would allow optometrists to perform eye surgery after a few days of seminar training. There is no comparison between a brief introduction and the years-long rigor of education that is the standard for surgical skill.

Please note that a nearly identical proposal went before the Vermont House in 2019. The Office of Profession Regulation (OPR) conducted a five-month nationwide study, evaluating safety, public health needs, cost, and access. OPR found that optometrists have no meaningful training as surgeons. Their conclusion is unequivocal: “After consulting with stakeholders and conducting extensive and thorough research, OPR cannot conclude that optometrists are properly trained in and can safely perform the proposed advanced procedures. Further, OPR finds that there is little need for, and minimal cost savings associated with, expanding the optometric scope of practice to include advanced procedures. For these reasons, OPR recommends against expanding the optometric scope of practice. . .”

There has been no change to these underlying facts. The only change has been a wave of lobbying.

The optometrists I know are good, professional people. They are expert in the art of measuring glasses and contact lens. But good intentions and personal decency do not yield qualification. None of them has attended medical school or surgical residency, the foundation for surgical proficiency.

In performing vital tasks, training and expertise matter. I urge you to vote No to S.64.

I am happy to discuss further.

David Diaz, MD