

Dear members of the House Health Care Committee,

Thank you so much for allowing us to begin testimony tomorrow. We are excited to share why S.64 should pass this year to improve the eye care landscape in Vermont. I realize that time is limited, but I am concerned that you will not get the whole picture of why this bill is important after hearing from only two people. The Senate Health and Welfare Committee were able to get a full picture of the merits of S.64 by allowing testimony from a robust slate. They heard from:

Three Vermont optometrists from different areas of the state (St. Albans, Bethel/White River Junction, and Rutland) who were able to give unique perspectives from both their regions and experiences.

Nate Lighthizer, OD, FAAO, FAAOMS, who is a dean of optometry at Northeastern State University College of Optometry in Oklahoma, a state where these procedures have been allowed since 1988. Not only does he teach the advanced procedures course required in the bill, but he is also involved in training pre-optometry students in these procedures before they graduate. Additionally, he authored a couple journal articles, including the study that showed only two negative outcomes out of 146,000 laser procedures performed by U.S. optometrists!

Alicia Feis, OD, FAAO who is the Dean of Midwestern University in Arizona, a state where these procedures are not allowed; She is also President of the Associated Schools and Colleges of Optometry, an organization that works closely with the accreditation council of optometry schools to maintain high academic standards in all optometry schools and to make sure that all of these schools have the procedures from S.64 standardized in their curriculum, which they have since 2019. She also was able to shed some light on the similarities and differences between optometric education and ophthalmologic education, as well as describing how optometrists get trained in states where these procedures are not allowed.

Amy Puerto, OD, FAAO from Louisiana, who is on the American Optometric Association's Board of Trustees and has been practicing these procedures for over a decade. She spoke about her experience getting trained in Tennessee, a state where these procedures were not allowed, and how that prepared her for doing them today in her office. She also spoke on the history of how optometry scope has changed over time and how optometric education prepares students for where eye care is going — not only where it currently is. She spent a lot of time covering safety of these procedures and particularly the guardrails in S.64.

I will do my very best tomorrow to cover what I can from what these professionals were able to convey, but I do hope you consider hearing more from them or at least reading or listening to the testimony they gave in Senate Health & Welfare earlier this year. Thank you again for the opportunity to speak tomorrow!

Sincerely,

Tina Keshava, OD
VOA President
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