

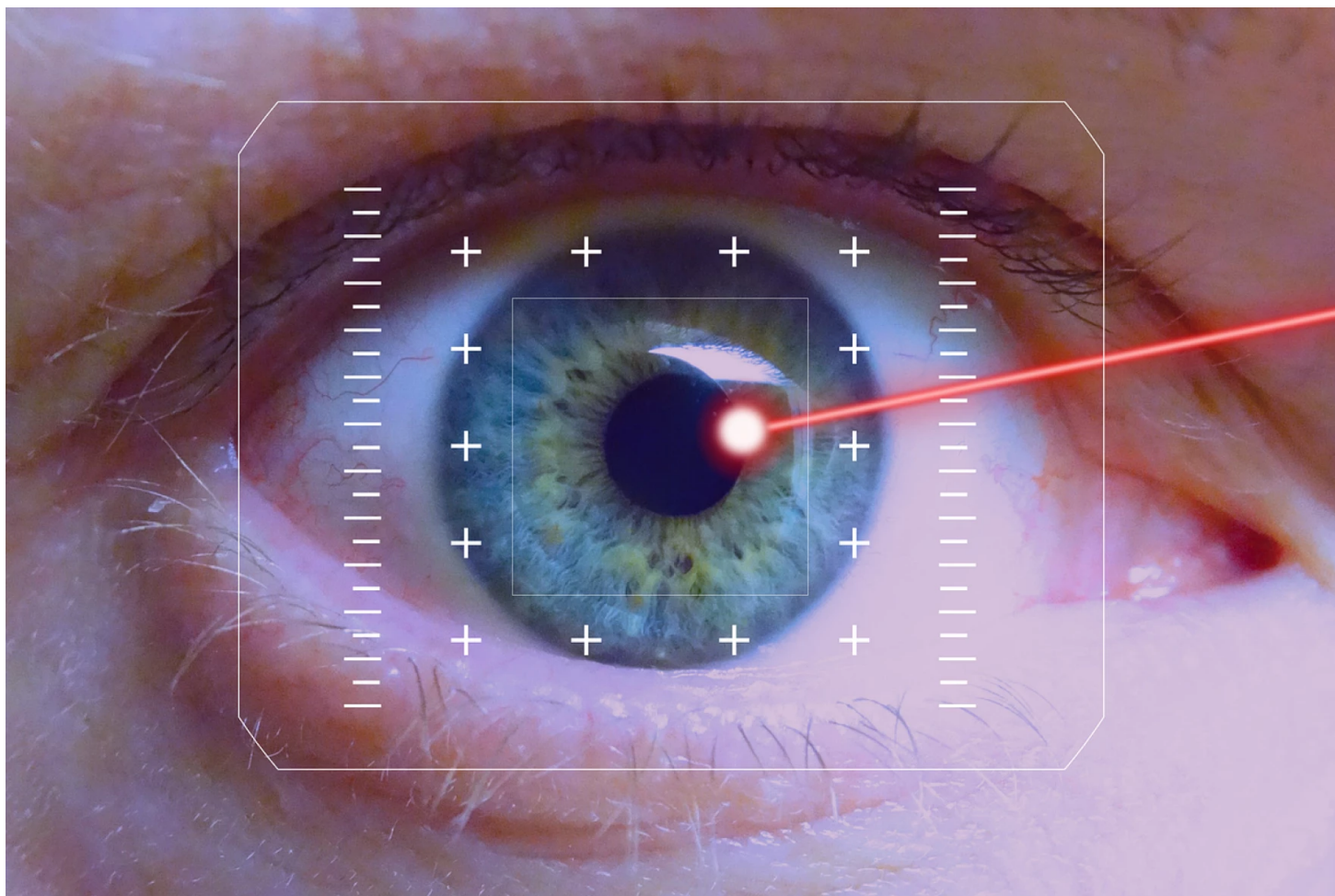
Governor vetoes controversial bill allowing non-surgeons to perform laser eye surgery

KUNM | By [Daniel Montaña](#)

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surgeon.

Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham [vetoed 16 bills](#) Friday morning, including one that would have allowed optometrists — who specialize in primary eye care and corrective lenses, and do not attend medical school — to perform certain delicate laser eye surgeries.

A professional association of eye surgeons celebrated the governor's decision.

The [New Mexico Academy of Ophthalmology](#) campaigned for the governor's veto [saying the bill could put New Mexicans' safety at risk](#).

President of the academy and pediatric ophthalmologist, Dr. Rebecca Leeneheer, said [House Bill 36](#) would have allowed optometrists to do the work of ophthalmologists, who take eight years of specialized schooling and training after their bachelor's including medical school and residency.

The bill would have allowed optometrists to perform certain surgeries after only a 36-hour course and four hours practicing on a model unsupervised by an actual eye surgeon.

"Surgery should be done by surgeons," she said. "And the optometrists are great at their their job, but they're not ready to be doing surgeries."

Leeneheer points to [a study](#) that found patients were 189% more likely to require additional surgeries after having one done by an optometrist versus an actual eye surgeon.

"I'm just so thankful to the governor for considering the issue seriously. I thought her reasoning was excellent," she said. "She helped save New Mexicans' vision."

Supporters' main argument for the bill during the legislative session was that it would make it easier for people to find providers, especially in rural areas.

But in [her message accompanying the veto](#), Lujan Grisham referenced data that shows allowing optometrists to perform these surgeries has not increased access to

care for patients in other states, because optometrists who do choose to start providing laser surgeries typically set up shop within a 30-minute drive of a practicing ophthalmologist.

She also said the bill would have set “a dangerous precedent” by allowing non-surgeons to perform surgeries, but added if the bill comes back in a future session with more stringent training requirements, she might consider signing it into law.

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Daniel Montañó

Daniel Montañó is a reporter with KUNM's Public Health, Poverty and Equity project. He is also an occasional host of Morning Edition, All Things Considered, and Let's Talk New Mexico since 2021, is a born and bred Burqueño who first started with KUNM about two decades ago, as a production assistant while he was in high school. During the intervening years, he studied journalism at UNM, lived abroad, fell in and out of love, conquered here and there, failed here and there, and developed a taste for advocating for human rights.

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Daniel Montaña, March 27, 2025

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