

Board of Examiners in Optometry
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To: Senate Federal and State Affairs Committee
Senator Jacob LaTurner, Chair

From: Ron D. Hansen, O.D., President
Kansas State Board of Examiners in Optometry

Date: February 1, 2017

Subject: SB 76 – Professional occupations; restrictions on fees and licensing requirements

The Kansas State Board of Examiners in Optometry (KSSBEO) appreciates the opportunity to provide testimony regarding Senate Bill 76. As the bill is currently drafted, the KSSBEO stands in opposition to the bill.

The mission of the KSSEBO is to administer and enforce the provisions of Kansas Optometry Law so that the highest quality of eye care is provided to the citizens of Kansas. Optometrists in Kansas are independent primary health care providers who examine, diagnose, treat and manage diseases and disorders of the visual system, the eye and associated structures as well as diagnose related systemic conditions.

They examine the internal and external structures of the eyes to diagnose eye diseases like glaucoma, cataracts, and retinal disorders; systemic diseases like hypertension and diabetes; and vision conditions like nearsightedness, farsightedness, astigmatism, and presbyopia. Optometrists also test to determine the patient's ability to focus and coordinate the eyes, and to judge depth and colors accurately. They prescribe eyeglasses and contact lenses, low vision aids, vision therapy and medicines to treat eye diseases. As primary care providers, optometrists are an integral part of the health care team and an entry point into the health care system. They are skilled in the co-management of health care that affects the eye health and vision of their patients and an excellent source of referral to other health care professionals.

SB 76 requires that licensees from other states wishing to practice in Kansas be granted a Kansas license without proper vetting. This is a concern to the KSSBEO, because the scope of practice of optometrists is determined legislatively by each state. Optometrists licensed in different states, therefore, may have different privileges that those in Kansas. And while all optometrists in Kansas are at the same level of licensure, some states offer varying levels of licensure within the state. When an optometrist licensed in another state applies for licensure in Kansas, the KSSBEO looks at the practice act in that state to determine if it is similar to that in Kansas. If it is not, the optometrist may be required to take additional continuing education and provide appropriate proof of competency before licensure is granted. To automatically provide a license, then, to a doctor from a state with a lower level of licensure without proper evaluation of that doctor's education history would not be in the best interest in the patients of Kansas.

Another provision of SB 76 would be to waive all licensure fees for low-income and military families. This would strain an already tight budget for the KSSBEO, possibly decreasing services available to Kansas licensees and the public.

The KSSBEO respectfully requests that the Committee not pass SB 76 in its current form.