



February 28, 2017

North Carolina General Assembly
House Committee on Health
Representative Jones, Chair
Representative Burr, Chair
Representative Dobson, Chair
Representative Lambeth, Chair
Representative Murphy, Chair
Legislative Building
16 West Jones Street
Raleigh, NC 27601

Honorable Committee Members:

On behalf of the American Society of Plastic Surgeons (ASPS) and the North Carolina Society of Plastic Surgeons we urge you to oppose HB 36, the Enact Enhanced Access to Eye Care Act, which would expand the scope of practice for optometrists beyond their professional training. The North Carolina Society of Plastic Surgeons is the largest association of plastic surgeons in North Carolina and, in conjunction with our national affiliate the American Society of Plastic Surgeons, collectively represent 189 board-certified plastic surgeons in the state. As surgeons, we encourage you to maintain the high level of patient care that has been established and maintain current standards that permit only licensed Medical Doctors (MD) or Doctors of Osteopathic Medicine (DO) who meet appropriate education, training and professional standards to perform surgery in the ocular region.

If passed, HB 36 would allow non-physician optometrists to perform laser and scalpel surgical procedures in and around the eye. This includes procedures that fall squarely within the practice of medicine. Alarming, the bill also does not include any educational requirements for optometrists to perform these surgical procedures. When optometrist scope of practice is improperly expanded, patients suffer. Sadly, in 2009, several patients at a VA facility received inadequate treatment for glaucoma from optometrists. An investigation found that as a result of the poor treatment 22 patients were found to have progressive vision loss.¹ Ophthalmologists and plastic surgeons must attain a core medical and surgical education while completing seven to ten years of training, which includes increasing responsibility and decision-making authority in the hospital setting. Optometrists only complete four to five years of education with significantly less

¹ Dremann, Sue. VA investigates glaucoma patients' treatment: 'Exhaustive' internal review found inadequate referrals; optometry chief sidelined. Palo Alto Weekly, July 23, 2009.

clinical exposure and responsibility. In sum, allowing optometrists to practice medicine without the requisite medical school and residency training would jeopardize patient safety and lower the standard of care in the state.

Due to patient safety issues, such as the possibility of complications arising from surgery and serious risk of vision loss, it is critical that such procedures are performed by physician surgeons who have the comprehensive training and board certification to handle those complications when they do occur. Therefore, we urge you to **OPPOSE** HB 36 to protect the high standard of patient safety in North Carolina.

Sincerely,



Debra Johnson, MD
President, American Society of Plastic Surgeons



Mary Ann Contogiannis, MD
President, North Carolina Society of Plastic Surgeons