

5/13/2025

Good Afternoon, Senator Bailey, Representative Mathieson, and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health Coverage, Insurance, and Financial Services. My name is Alyson Maloy and I am from Portland, ME. I am a practicing neurologist and psychiatrist in southern Maine. I am submitting this testimony against LD 1803 – An Act to Amend the Laws Governing Optometric Practice.

I did not realize that optometrists were not medical doctors until I was half-way through medical school! Despite years of work in the field of medicine (volunteer work, premed, two years medical school), I didn't know that ophthalmologists are what medical eye doctors are called and optometrists are another type of healthcare professional who does eye exams and vision tests, prescribes corrective lenses, detect eye abnormalities, and can prescribe some treatments for some eye diseases. If it took me going to medical school to learn the difference, I think it's fair to say most people have no idea that optometry doctors are not medical doctors. (It is still illegal in all states to practice medicine if you don't have a license to practice medicine, which optometrists do not.) There are real risks in expanding the scope of practice of optometry into medical domains and I would like to quickly share my own experience receiving a prescription treatment for an eye problem from an optometrist.

About five years ago I went to my optometrist in South Portland for an eye infection. He is a very experienced optometrist, in practice more than 30 years. He told me he takes pride in how his eye care surpasses that of many other optometrists due to his experience training and working in the military, followed by 20 years of private group practice, which he owns. He prescribed topical antibiotics and topical steroid eye drops for my eye infection. I followed the prescription as directed. About nine days in, I woke up and my eyeballs were glued to my eyelids. I literally had to tear my eyelids off my eyes to open them. The pain was excruciating. I immediately saw him later that day. He told me that I was supposed to use saline drops with the steroids. He had not told me this, nor had anyone in his office. This was a cavalier medication oversight based on lack of healthy understanding of the many factors that go into safely prescribing *anything*.

The optometrist urgently referred me to a corneal specialist ophthalmologist. After several visits and tests, he then referred me to a retinal ophthalmologist specialist, who did further testing. Long story short, I spent hundreds of dollars in medical costs, hours of lost work spent in medical appointments, and about eight months in physical recovery. The complications of this optometry oversight required enormous healthcare resources and I was terrified that the damage would be permanent. I am grateful that the damage to my eyes did fully resolve. I am in a unique position as a physician in that I could ask my medical friends for advice and advocate for myself within the medical system. Most people do not have those opportunities and so this catastrophe would have been even more overwhelming for them.

I share this story with you because even topical steroids are dangerous. All medications are dangerous. I am terrified to think optometrists could be allowed to prescribe systemic steroids, which can have even more dangerous side effects than the topical ones my optometrist prescribed to me. I think it is understandable that non-physicians might underestimate the rigors of medical training - and to believe that certain medications or procedures are not dangerous – because it's hard to understand training until you do it. I urge you to believe physicians when we say, our exhaustive medical training matters. The scope of practice for various professions is based on standardized training and demonstrated competency over years and years. Lowering educational requirements increases the likelihood of harm and overburdens the medical system fixing those errors and oversights. When catastrophe happens to *your eyes*, the impact of scope expansion is real and tragic. I am active with scope of practice issues because as a patient, I have personally experienced harm and, as a physician, I daily observe preventable harm done to patients through sheer lack of proper oversight by the legislature. I urge you to oppose LD1803 and protect patients. The severe and expensive eye damage that I experienced could have been permanent, and yet it is far less than what could be done with what is being proposed by LD 1803.

Thank you for your consideration.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Alyson Maloy MD". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the "MD" part being more distinct and larger than the first name.

Alyson Maloy, MD