

The Honorable Donna Bailey and Honorable Kristi Mathieson  
Committee on Health Coverage, Insurance, and Financial Services  
c/o Legislative Information Office  
Maine State House  
100 State House Station  
Augusta, ME 04333

Madame Chair, and Members of the Health Coverage, Insurance, and Financial Services Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today. I'm speaking today in support of LD 1803.

My name is Dr. Paul Barney, I'm an Optometrist and I practice in Anchorage, Alaska. I am a past Chair of the Alaska Board of Examiners in Optometry, I am also on the Board of Trustees of the American Optometric Association. Additionally, I am an adjunct professor at two accredited US Optometry Schools.

I believe that I bring a valuable perspective to today's discussion as I'm a practicing doctor of optometry who routinely provides laser and other surgical care to my patients, and who practices in a state, that similar to Maine, is largely rural.

In 2017 the Alaska Legislature passed HB 103 which gave Alaska optometrists the authority to perform anterior segment laser procedures and surgical procedures to the lids and surrounding tissue, it also gave the Alaska Board of Optometry the authority to determine scope of practice, commensurate to what is taught at accredited schools and colleges of optometry. The Alaska legislation passed in 2017 is similar to LD 1803.

The Board authority to determine scope of practice is what I would like to discuss with you today.

When the Alaska legislature gave this responsibility to the Alaska Board of Optometry, they did so because they felt that licensed professionals within optometry, were more qualified to make decisions regarding the education and training of the profession, than they were as legislators. To ensure public safety, the Alaska legislature put safeguards in the statute that prevent the Board of Optometry from writing regulations for procedures that are not taught at accredited schools and colleges of optometry, and that are not within the scope of education and training that optometry students receive prior to graduation. Those safeguards also prohibit licensees from self-determining their scope of training.

Since the enactment of HB 103 in Alaska, there have been no reported cases of adverse events or outcomes related to optometrists doing laser or surgical procedures. There also have been

no complaints or criticisms towards the Alaska Board of Optometry for expanding scope of practice beyond current education and training received at accredited optometry schools.

The Alaska Board of Optometry has found that they have had adequate resources to handle the increased responsibility that HB 103 has given the Board. They have also not found that they have been under increased pressure to expand scope of practice beyond current optometric education and training. The Board, in fact, has taken a very cautious and conservative approach when considering scope expansion.

Our experience in Alaska with optometrists doing anterior segment laser and surgical procedures, and with Board autonomy, has been very positive. We have had no adverse events associated with this legislation, patients now have better access to this valuable care, and as eye care technology, education, and training expand, the Alaska Board of Optometry can expand scope of practice cautiously and responsibly, without burdening the Alaska legislature with that task and unnecessary expense.

Eye care technology has been advancing rapidly over the past few decades, and it is important that patients have access to up-to-date care and technology. To keep up with the advances in technology, schools and colleges of optometry advance the scope of the education and training they provide. It is also important for scope of practice to change accordingly. Allowing the Maine Board of Optometry the authority to change scope of practice as optometric education and training changes, will give residents of Maine access to the most current and up to date level of care available, while also maintaining public safety.

I respectfully request that you vote in favor of LD 1803. This legislation will increase access to care for your residents and will ensure that as technology changes, they will continue to have access to the highest level of care.

Respectfully yours,

Paul M. Barney, O.D.

*Center Director, Pacific Cataract & Laser Institute  
1600 A Street, Suite 200  
Anchorage, AK 99501*

*Trustee, Board of Trustees  
American Optometric Association*