



Stacy Brenner
Senator, District 30

THE MAINE SENATE
132nd Legislature

3 State House Station
Augusta, Maine 04333

Testimony of Senator Stacy Brenner introducing
LD 1803, An Act to Amend the Laws Governing Optometric Practice
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Health Coverage, Insurance and Financial Services

May 13, 2025

Senator Bailey, Representative Matheison and esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health Coverage, Insurance and Financial Services. My name is Stacy Brenner and I represent Senate District 30, which includes most of Scarborough and all of Gorham. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today to introduce LD 1803, "*An Act to Amend the Laws Governing Optometric Practice*." This bill addresses a critical access-to-care issue in our state, particularly for rural and underserved communities. This legislation reflects a commonsense approach to modernizing our scope-of-practice laws to match the education, training, and capabilities of today's Optometrists—while also responding to the urgent needs of our communities.

Let me begin by emphasizing the depth of education our Optometrists receive. They complete four years of undergraduate education, followed by four rigorous years at an accredited College of Optometry. Many pursue post-graduate residencies or internships, just as other medical professionals do. These are highly trained providers, and we will hear today from educators who help prepare them for safe, evidence-based practice.

LD 1803 would allow Optometrists in Maine to provide a limited set of in-office procedures that they are trained to perform—procedures that do *not* involve surgical suites, cutting, or the use of operating rooms. These are *not* surgeries. They are safe, outpatient interventions currently performed in 12 other states, including Oklahoma, which has had this expanded scope for over 30 years. Two more states—West Virginia and Montana—passed similar laws this year.

This is also a workforce and access issue. Right now in Maine, especially in our rural areas, patients are facing months-long delays for care that could be delivered quickly and safely by their local Optometrist. Let me give you just one example.

A school bus driver in Newport developed a vision problem. Her local Optometrist diagnosed the issue—and had the training to treat it—but Maine law prevented them from doing so. The driver had to wait months for an appointment with an Ophthalmologist. In the meantime, she lost her job because she couldn't safely transport students. That is a failure of our system, not a reflection of her Optometrist's skills.

This isn't an isolated story. We have wait times of more than six months just for a consult with an Ophthalmologist—and then additional delays for treatment. And the situation is getting



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worse. The number of practicing Ophthalmologists is shrinking, both in Maine and nationally. We will hear testimony today from an expert on this very trend.

This bill provides a solution. It gives the Board of Optometry the ability to require additional training or proctoring if they believe it's necessary, and it includes a delayed effective date to allow for implementation. Other states have developed sound models for training, and we can follow their lead.

It's worth noting that, by Maine statute—**32 MRS §19308**—Optometrists are held to the *same standard of care* as Ophthalmologists. They are accountable. They are trained. They are ready.

And if we do not act, we risk losing young talent. I've spoken with soon-to-be graduates of Optometric Colleges who want to return to Maine to serve their communities. But when asked about Maine's scope of practice, too many say, "I'll have to go elsewhere." We can't afford to lose them—not now.

Some may raise concerns about whether Optometrists are trained on "live eyes." The reality is: in states with an expanded scope, they are. And those seeking additional experience can—and do—travel to other states to get that training. Our bill anticipates these needs by building in time and flexibility for continuing education and proctoring.

Lastly, I want to preempt a strategy we've seen in other states, like New Hampshire, where opponents of similar legislation used photos of operating rooms and surgical equipment to stoke fear. Let me be clear: **this bill does not authorize surgery.** It authorizes common-sense, in-office procedures that Optometrists are educated and equipped to perform.

LD 1803 is a step toward a more accessible, more efficient, and more modern eye care system in Maine. It helps our rural patients, supports our healthcare workforce and upholds the standards of safety and quality that every Mainer deserves.

I urge the Committee to vote Ought to Pass on LD 1803. Thank you for your time, and I'm happy to answer any questions.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Stacy Brenner".

Senator Stacy Brenner