



Mark W. Lawrence
Senator, District 35

THE MAINE SENATE
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3 State House Station
Augusta, Maine 04333

Testimony for Sen. Mark Lawrence in support of
LD 1803, An Act to Amend the Laws Governing Optometric Practice
Before the Joint Standing Committee of Health Coverage, Insurance and Financial Services

Senator Bailey, Representative Mathieson and esteemed members of the Health Coverage, Insurance and Financial Services Committee, my name is Mark Lawrence. I am the State Senator from District 35 in southern York County, proudly representing Eliot, Kittery, Ogunquit, South Berwick, and York.

One of the benefits of experience is to allow a legislator to remember past legislation on point. In 1995, I was a cosponsor of then LD 800, An Act to Amend the Laws Related to Optometry. That bill proposed to allow optometrists to use certain therapeutic drugs and to treat glaucoma. The ophthalmological community vehemently objected to the legislation. The Maine Ophthalmological Association argued that the results would be dire – that Maine citizens would suffer adverse results from optometric care, debilitating eye disease and in some instances blindness. Ophthalmologists argued that optometrists did not have the education, experience or capability to treat the conditions at issue in that legislation. They ignored the key issue of access. They downplayed the problem of significantly delayed care.

In fact, none of these apocalyptic predictions came true. Optometrists have been able to treat the conditions authorized by LD 800 for decades reducing wait times for what otherwise would be mandatory ophthalmological care and providing Maine citizens with excellent care closer to home. In short, the legislation was and remains a resounding success.

It is unfortunate that ophthalmology continues to ignore the successes of the various scope expansion bills to date and the benefits consequently derived by Maine citizens. In 1995 this ophthalmological opposition was clearly a case of economic turf protection, not in fact quality of care. The same is true of LD 1803. Well-trained and educated optometrists will be able to provide quality care to Maine's citizens on a quicker and local basis. What is wrong with that?

That is why I am cosponsoring LD 1803. I urge you to reject ophthalmology's self-interested economic protectionism and enact LD 1803. Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony, I would be pleased to answer any questions the Committee might have.