

Members of the Maine State committee on Healthcare, Insurance, and Finance,

My name is Dr. Eric Lehouillier, and I am a practicing optometrist in Biddeford, and live full-time with my wife and young son in Saco. I am writing to you in favor of LD 1803.

The most compelling reason to support this measure is simple: it saves money—both for patients and for the state's healthcare system.

Let me explain. In Maine, when patients require common a noninvasive procedure like a YAG laser capsulotomy they must be referred to an ophthalmologist, which can mean longer wait times, additional co-pays, and unnecessary travel. These delays can impact patient outcomes and add avoidable costs.

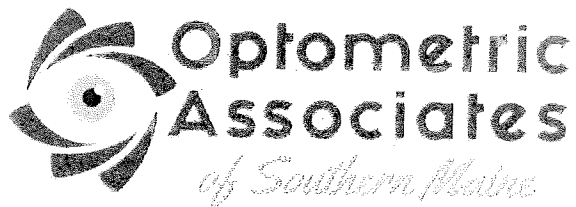
More importantly, Medicare data shows that expanding access to laser procedures through optometrists reduces healthcare spending. From 2015 to 2018, the proportion of selective laser trabeculoplasty (SLT) procedures performed by optometrists rose from 11.3% to 17.9%, while overall Medicare-allowed payments for the procedure dropped by 33% nationwide¹. This is a clear sign that optometrists deliver care at a lower cost without compromising safety.

Optometrists and ophthalmologists are reimbursed the same, but ophthalmologists often perform these procedures in an outpatient surgical facility setting, which can lead to higher overall costs due to additional facility fees.

Additionally, an American Optometric Association survey found that in states where optometrists perform YAG laser procedures² 97% of patients reported satisfaction with the convenience of receiving care in their optometrist's office, and 46% reported saving money as a direct result.

Allowing optometrists in Maine to perform these same services will mean that patients can receive high-quality, affordable care in their communities—often without having to wait weeks or travel hours to see a specialist. For patients on fixed incomes or living in rural areas, this is not just about convenience; it's about access and affordability.

As healthcare costs continue to rise, Maine has the opportunity to modernize its laws, align with national best practices, and provide real savings to patients and insurers. We are not asking for special privileges—we are asking for the ability to fully use the education, training,



and skills we already have to better serve our communities.

Thank you for your time, your service, and your thoughtful consideration of LD 1803.

Kindest regards,

Dr. Eric S. Lehouillier OD

28 Trailside Circle, Saco, ME 04072

C:207-468-0236

E: eric.lehouillier@gmail.com

ⁱ Hussain ZS, Muayad J, Harvey BJ, Al-Aswad LA, Fakoya AOJ, Yousefi S. Rates of Laser Trabeculoplasty by Ophthalmologists and Optometrists: A Comparative Analysis of the CMS Medicare Public Use File. *Clin Ophthalmol*. 2024 Jan 30;18:269-275. doi: 10.2147/OPTH.S438052. PMID: 38312307; PMCID: PMC10838098.

ⁱⁱ American Optometric Association. (2023, July 13). YAG procedures by doctors of optometry, after cataract surgery, better for patients' care and convenience, AOA survey says. <https://www.aoa.org/news/advocacy/state-advocacy/yag-procedures-by-doctors-of-optometry-after-cataract-surgery-better-for-patients-care-and-convenience-aoa-survey-says>