



Kansas Society of Eye Physicians & Surgeons

Testimony of the Kansas Society of Eye Physicians & Surgeons
Mary Champion, MD – President
SB 490 – In Opposition
Senate Public Health and Welfare Committee
February 20, 2024

Madam Chair and members of the Committee, my name is Mary Champion, MD. I am a physician ophthalmologist, and I appear today as the President of the Kansas Society of Eye Physicians & Surgeons and the ophthalmologists who practice throughout the State of Kansas.

The Kansas State Legislature and those who regulate licensed professions assure that the individuals providing health care services are properly qualified. This is critical when considering the procedures in this bill. The anatomy of the eyelid and eyeball are very complex, and the structures are microscopic. The eyelid is only 2-3 mm thick, the thickness of cereal box cardboard; the target for a YAG laser is approximately 5% the thickness of a human hair. The margin for error is extremely small.

This bill removes from the optometry practice act a prohibition on surgery and injections. All surgery, lasers, and injections involve risk -- whether it is with a scalpel or a powerful laser that burns or cuts parts of the eyelid or eyeball. It is concerning when anyone minimizes potential cancers as “lumps and bumps” which, if improperly cut, can spread cancer throughout the body or disfigure a face. This bill permits removal of skin lesions “without a known malignancy” – but you cannot tell by just looking if any lesion has cancer cells in it.

There is not an “access” problem for Kansans to reach a qualified ophthalmologist for any of the procedures in this bill. 97% of Kansas residents are within an hour’s drive of an ophthalmologist and 92% are as close or closer to an ophthalmologist than to a Walmart. There is no reason to lower the standards of care in Kansas.

There is no evidence that recruiting optometrists to Kansas is problematic with the current scope of practice – the same scope as a majority of states. Kansas has the third highest number of optometrists per capita nationally, higher than all the states where laser or lid surgery is allowed.

As you have heard from Dr. Hug and Dr. Unruh, surgery requires medical school and residency training - not just lectures or practice on an inanimate object.

When I see patients, frightened at the thought of laser or scalpel surgery, they often ask me “how many of these procedures have you done?” or “will you be the one doing this?” or “have you seen this before?” They want to know that I am qualified. We ask them to blindly (no pun intended) trust that I have met the standards set forth by my profession and the legislature. It is a privilege that I am allowed to touch patients, and that privilege is earned through my training.

Kansans deserve to have the qualified surgeons performing eye surgery procedures on them -- lasers and with sharp instruments such as a scalpel. On behalf of the patients we serve, and the eye physicians and surgeons of Kansas, we ask that you retain the current provisions in the optometry scope of practice and oppose Senate Bill 490.