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TO: Senate Public Health and Welfare
FROM: Todd Fleischer, CAE
Executive Director
RE: Testimony Regarding HB 2674

My name is Todd Fleischer. I am the Executive Director of the Kansas Optometric Association, which represents optometrists across Kansas. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony regarding House Bill 2674.

As primary eye care providers, optometrists not only diagnose and treat vision problems and eye disease, but also detect a multitude of other health issues, ranging from high blood pressure and diabetes to glaucoma and other significant health concerns. Early detection and treatment can have significant effect on a patient's overall health and result in considerable cost savings.

Optometrists are not specifically included in the language of House Bill 2674. However, while we are blessed with members serving communities across the state, we believe that telemedicine is an important patient care issue that needs to be addressed as it is becoming an integral part of the health care delivery system as other professions face shortages of providers, particularly in rural areas.

It is our understanding that the proponents of the bill are seeking to define telemedicine and reinforce that health care delivered through telecommunications should involve the same standard of care as in-person care. We fully support that position for all provider types.

There are currently organizations who are using online and other computer- or app-based programs to generate an approximate eyeglass or contact lens prescription, without the individual ever seeing an optometrist or ophthalmologist. These eliminate all components and aspects of an exam that deal with eye health. While some may not see the harm in this, the consequences can be significant.

An appropriate in-person eye exam can detect a number of health issues, and what a patient assumes is just his or her eyesight failing could actually be symptoms associated with diabetes, glaucoma or even a tumor that is affecting vision. That is why standard of care dictates that an exam includes certain components and that an optometrist or ophthalmologist licensed in Kansas can only delegate certain components of an exam to an on-site technician. Standard of care for contact lenses also requires

additional testing and proper fitting of the lenses, which can vary in oxygen permeability and design. Improper fitting and no training on proper contact lens wear and care can lead to discomfort, corneal abrasions, corneal ulcers and other conditions that can permanently affect vision.

As such, we are supportive of the protections afforded to patients by requiring that standard of care is met, regardless of how or where that care is delivered. Optometrists are not currently included in the health care provider definition in this bill, but our assumption is that the intent of the bill applies standard of care to all provider types, but coverage parity is specific to the health care providers defined in the bill. If the intent is different, we may seek an amendment clarifying that going forward.

Thank you for your careful consideration of HB 2674.