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March 16, 2022

TO: Senate Committee on Federal and State Affairs
FROM: Todd Fleischer, CAE
Executive Director
RE: Testimony Regarding Senate Bill 560

I am Todd Fleischer, the Executive Director of the Kansas Optometric Association, which represents Kansas optometrists. Thank you for the opportunity to submit neutral testimony on Senate Bill 560, which relates to medical marijuana.

Doctors of optometry are independent primary health care providers who examine, diagnose, treat and manage diseases and disorders of the visual system, the eye and associated structures as well as diagnose related systemic conditions. They examine the internal and external structure of the eyes to diagnose eye diseases like glaucoma, cataracts and retinal disorders; systemic diseases like hypertension and diabetes; and vision conditions like nearsightedness, farsightedness, astigmatism and presbyopia. Optometrists also do testing to determine the patient's ability to focus and coordinate the eyes, and to judge depth and see colors accurately. They prescribe eyeglasses and contact lenses, low vision aids, vision therapy and medicines to treat eye disease.

As primary eye care providers in all corners of the state, optometrists are an integral part of the health care team and an entry point into the health care system. They are skilled in the co-management of surgical eye care, such as cataract, glaucoma or retinal procedures, which affects the eye health and vision of their patients and an excellent source of referrals to other health care professionals.

Through this bill, optometrists are not included in the definition of health care providers who could potentially prescribe medical marijuana. We are not requesting to be added to the list of eligible providers. However, we believe that glaucoma should be removed from the list of qualifying medical conditions eligible for treatment with medical marijuana. Current research indicates that while there is a reduction in intraocular pressure with marijuana use, the effects are not sustainable without continued use, so the risks to the patient from prolonged use are higher than with other treatment options.

If this bill is advanced, we respectfully request that glaucoma be removed from the list of qualifying medical conditions, until such time that research shows that it is an effective and safe treatment option for patients.

Thank you for your consideration of our comments regarding Senate Bill 560.

