

Optometric Scope Expansion

Doctors of Optometry, who practice throughout this state, enable Alabamians to have local access to safe, quality primary eye health care.

Alabama's optometry law has not been significantly updated since 1995, but medicine has dramatically changed since then. In order to continue to bring the highest quality eye and vision care to our citizens, our optometry law needs to be updated to reflect the changes in education and technology.

What Does This Bill Do?

- This bill will expand access to care for all Alabamians by allowing Doctors of Optometry to perform limited laser procedures in their offices, lessening travel time and expenses for many patients.
- These in-office procedures do not require general anesthesia.
- Doctors of Optometry will be able to treat the same conditions that they have always diagnosed without patients having to schedule an appointment with another medical professional, saving them time and money.
- This will not broaden the scope of what conditions optometrists currently manage and/or treat. Instead it will enable optometrists to utilize the latest technologies to bring their patients the best possible care.

Other States Are Leading The Way On This Issue

- Doctors of Optometry in other states have been performing these procedures for 20 years.
- The states that have already passed legislation to allow these procedures have seen no increase in malpractice premiums:
 - Oklahoma (1998)
 - Kentucky (2011)
 - Louisiana (2014)
 - Alaska (2017)
 - Arkansas (2019)
 - Mississippi (2021)
 - Wyoming (2021)
 - Colorado (2022)
 - Virginia (2022)

Examples of Procedures Included In This Bill

- **YAG Capsulotomy (YAG)** – Common in-office procedure to open cloudy film on lens implant after cataract surgery.
- **Selective Laser Trabeculoplasty (SLT)** – Common in-office procedure to treat elevated intraocular pressure from glaucoma.
- **Removal and Identification of Skin Lesions Around Eye** – Common in-office procedure to remove benign lesions around the eye. Would allow for the use of a numbing injection to the area before removal.

Procedures that are EXCLUDED In This Bill

- Injections into the eyeball
- Cataract Surgery
- Muscle Surgery
- Retinal Surgery
- Radial Keratotomy
- Refractive Laser Surgery (e.g. LASIK)
- Cryosurgery
- Peripheral Iridotomy

What Training Will Be Required?

- Optometrists will have to complete 36 hours of board-approved specialized training in these procedures
- They will have to personally performed at least 10 procedures on live human patients under the direct supervision of an ophthalmologist or a certified optometrist

These Procedures Are Being Taught in Optometry School

- Optometry schools have already incorporated these procedures into their curriculums.
- Doctors of optometry receive extensive training in a 4-year program dedicated to learning about the eye and vision care. This is after receiving an undergraduate degree. Many optometrists in Alabama have additionally completed residency training.
- New graduates from optometry school are now choosing to practice in other states because Alabama doesn't allow them to use the latest technology and practice to the fullest extent of their training.
- Many practicing doctors have taken additional extensive coursework for further training in lasers and other advanced procedures.
- Most practicing MDs utilize technologies that they did not learn in medical school or residency. Why? Because the latest technologies and procedures were not invented until after they entered practice. These fine medical doctors learn to do these things by going to continuing education courses, not going back for years of medical school. Optometrists do the same thing.

Why Is This Good For Alabama?

- This bill will expand access for all Alabamians by allowing patients to undergo certain procedures at their optometrist's office when more convenient than the nearest ophthalmology office.
- According to a study conducted by The Eyesight Foundation in 2010, Doctors of Optometry have locations in 57 counties in Alabama. Ophthalmologists have locations in only 24 counties, making it more difficult for some of our citizens to receive the care they need.