

Re: Testimony in support of HB 2223
Written testimony only
Blake Benson



March 21, 2025

The Honorable Beverly Gossage, Chair
Senate Committee on Public Health and Welfare
Room: 445-S
300 SW 10th Street
Topeka KS 66612

Dear Chair Gossage and members of the Senate Committee on Public Health and Welfare:

On behalf of the Pittsburg Area Chamber of Commerce and our 500+ member businesses, representing over 10,000 employees throughout Southeast Kansas, please allow me to voice our support for HB 2223. This bill would allow our Pittsburg area optometrists to practice a number of procedures for which they are trained, but not allowed to practice under current Kansas law even though these procedures are allowed in neighboring states like Oklahoma.

This bill would not only help our local optometrists remain competitive with their counterparts in other states, but would also ensure that Kansas residents can receive care at home with their trusted doctors.

I appreciate the opportunity to offer testimony in support of HB 2223, as it will be important to our state's residents and optometrists. Thank you again.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Blake Benson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "B" and a long, sweeping underline.

Blake Benson
President, Pittsburg Area Chamber of Commerce

Board of Examiners in Optometry
3109 W 6th St, Suite A
Lawrence, KS 66049



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Dawn Bircher, OD, President,
Sheena Nagaraja, OD, Vice-President
Gary Beaver, OD, Secretary-Treasurer
Philip Walters, OD, Member at Large
Seth Katz, Public Member

Jan Murray, CPM, Executive Officer

Laura Kelly, Governor

March 20, 2025

Senator Beverly Gossage, Chairman
Senate Committee on Public Health and Welfare
Kansas Statehouse
Topeka, KS 66603

Chairman Gossage:

My name is Dr. Dawn Bircher and I currently serve as the president of the Kansas State Board of Examiners in Optometry (KSSBEO). The mission of the KSSBEO is to regulate, administer, and enforce the provisions of Kansas Optometry Law so that the highest quality of eye care is provided to the citizens of Kansas. We believe that by vigorous enforcement of the law, we protect the public to ensure that the highest quality of comprehensive eye care is available to the citizens of Kansas and that it is delivered by qualified optometric practitioners.

Our role is to ensure compliance with the optometry law and as such, the Board is neutral on this bill. However, the procedures outlined in the bill are part of contemporary education and training. Knowledge related to these procedures is part of the rigorous national board examination, which successful passing is required in order to apply for licensure in Kansas.

If House Bill 2223 passes, the KSSBEO will take the necessary measures to ensure that Kansas optometrist in pursuit of performing these procedures will have the necessary training and certification to provide care safely for Kansas patients. The credentialing process can be done within existing resources; however, if needed, the bill does allow us to set fees to cover any unforeseen expenses.

HB 2223 also includes a few minor changes requested by the KSSBEO, including providing electronic means of providing lists of Kansas licenses, as well as allowing flexibility in where the KSSBEO could hold the licensing exam.

If you have questions or need additional information, please feel free to contact me at dawn.bircher@ks.gov.

Thank you for your service to Kansas.

Sincerely,

Dawn Bircher, OD
President, Kansas State Board of Examiners in Optometry

March 24, 2025

TO: SENATE PUBLIC HEALTH AND WELFARE COMMITTEE

FROM: DEREK BRYANT

RE: HB 2223

My name is Derek Bryant, I'm a Native Kansan from Winfield, Kansas, and I'm currently attending the Oklahoma College of Optometry. I also serve as the President for the American Optometric Student Association where I represent over 7,000 optometry students across the nation. I'm here today to ask you to vote yes for House Bill 2223. This bill will modernize the scope of practice for optometry in Kansas to include procedures that I am trained to do in school, that I provide to real, live patients while in school, and that I will be able to do independently in surrounding states like Oklahoma, Arkansas, and Colorado.

When I graduate in a few months, I hope to be able to return to Kansas and practice to the highest level that I am trained. I would also like to provide my patients with the highest level of care that I am trained to provide. This is a sentiment that is shared by many native Kansans pursuing optometry.

We surveyed native Kansan optometry students across the nation and this is what we found: About half of the students we surveyed are interested in going to a rural area. 90% of students say that scope of practice is a significant factor when it comes to deciding whether they will return to Kansas or not. 96% said they would be more likely to return to Kansas if scope was modernized as outlined in House Bill 2223 was passed. And 61% said that if scope modernization wasn't passed, they would be less likely to return to Kansas to practice.

Now myself, living in Winfield, Kansas since I was born, I would like to return home and serve my fellow Kansans. However, as of right now, I can provide my patients a higher level of care

and practice to the highest level of my training by driving just 25 minutes south into Oklahoma. I hope what you see in this is that, for young Kansans entering optometry, House Bill 2223 is a big deal when it comes to deciding whether or not to return to Kansas to practice. This bill isn't a matter of allowing optometrists to do anything new or anything we aren't trained to do properly. It is simply a matter of deregulation that allows us to do what we are already trained to do in school. It's also about preventing Kansans from crossing state lines, driving hours out of their way, or even delaying treatment that can be provided by a highly trained optometrist in their hometown. Our only barrier to this issue isn't our education; it's the current scope of practice for optometry in Kansas.

I would appreciate your support for House Bill 2223 and encourage you to pass it out favorably. Thank you for your attention and for your time today, and God bless.

Contact Information:

Phone: 620-222-4906

Email: dirkbryant14@gmail.com

Current Address: 1510 Northpark Dr. Tahlequah, OK 74464

Kansas Address: 3319 Cathlinda Dr. Winfield, KS 67156



NORTHEASTERN STATE UNIVERSITY

OKLAHOMA

COLLEGE OF OPTOMETRY

To: Chairwoman Beverly Gossage and Members of Senate Public Health and Welfare Committee
From: Cori Dorrell
Email: Cori.dorrell25@gmail.com
Phone: (785)-850-0094
March 20th, 2025

RE: HB 2223

Chairwoman Gossage and Members of the Senate Public Health and Welfare Committee, thank you for the opportunity to share my testimony with you today. My name is Cori Dorrell and I am currently a fourth year optometry student at Northeastern State University Oklahoma College of Optometry. I am originally from Highland, KS. As someone dedicated to improving eye care for my patients, I strongly urge you to support HB 2223, which seeks to modernize the scope of practice so that it more accurately reflects the changes in optometrists' level of training and the standard of care. This bill would be the first time in 25 years that Kansas optometrists have come to the legislature for an update.

Optometrists manage and treat medical conditions involving the eyes daily, along with prescribing glasses and contacts. The bill would allow optometrists to perform a specific handful of in-office treatments that we are trained and tested on during our 4 year optometry education, leaving more surgically advanced procedures to be performed by our ophthalmologists. This will eliminate the need to send patients out of state for treatment due to the limited diversity of specialties offered by the ophthalmologists in the state. We have the potential to better evenly distribute the access to eye care across Kansas.

As I'm a few months away from graduating and starting my career, I must weigh the choice of returning to Kansas or settling in a neighboring state where I can practice to the highest level of my training. To offer a specific example- In Oklahoma I have been performing SLT when indicated as my first-line therapy choice to treat glaucoma, a very common ocular disease. If I practice in Kansas that will be stripped away. I joined the profession to help people and save patients' sight. If I have to disappoint my patients by practicing in a state where their eyecare is restricted, I will not be fulfilled in my profession. That being said, I do not plan on returning to Kansas if optometry scope is not modernized. Other students from Kansas are in agreement with this statement and I am coming forward in this testimony to represent their voices as well as my own.

By passing HB 2223, you will increase optometry recruitment success and ensure that your constituents receive timely, high-quality treatment by their local providers. I urge you to support this bill and help to close the access to care gap for all Kansans. Thank you for your time and consideration, and thank you for your continued service to the state of Kansas.

Sincerely,

Cori Dorrell

Re: Testimony in Support of HB 2223

Written Testimony Only

Wayne Gilmore, O.D.

March 24, 2025

The Honorable Beverly Gossage, Chair
Senate Committee on Public Health & Welfare
Room 445-S
300 SW 10th Street
Topeka, KS 66612

Dear Madam Chair Gossage and Members of the Committee,

Please accept this letter in support of House Bill 2223, which modernizes the scope of practice for Kansas optometrists—something that has not been updated in over 25 years. After completing my education, I returned home to Southeast Kansas to practice in Parsons, taking over from my partner's retiring father, who had served the community since 1958. In rural Kansas, we practice full-scope optometry and provide emergency eye care at Labette Health, where I have served on the Board of Trustees since 2013.

Rather than simply restating the merits of this bill, I highlight excerpts from past testimony on Kansas optometry scope expansions. These show how opposition arguments have remained unchanged for nearly five decades—despite being repeatedly disproven.

In 1987, during testimony in support of SB 113, which allowed optometrists to prescribe topical drugs, a Kansas optometrist noted:

“It is worth remembering that Kansas Ophthalmologists testified in 1977 that patients would be harmed with these drugs.”

Former KOA Executive Director Gary Robbins, in 1987 written testimony, recalled opposition to the 1977 bill permitting optometrists to use diagnostic drugs:

“At the time, ophthalmologists and the Kansas Medical Society opposed the legislation on three basic grounds: lack of education, dramatic increase in malpractice claims for optometrists, and a fear for public safety. ... These concerns have proved to be unfounded. The State Board of Examiners of Optometry has not received a single complaint involving the misuse of a diagnostic drug. ... The scenario facing you today is

Wayne Gilmore, O.D.

Eyecare Associates of Parsons

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identical. We don't believe that requesting an update in our practice act every ten years is unrealistic. It is needed to reflect the changes in optometric education and training."

The same is true for HB 2223. Every procedure Kansas optometrists seek to add has been performed safely in Oklahoma for nearly 30 years—directly refuting opposition claims, just as history has time and time again.

Opponent testimony will likely include individuals with both MD and OD degrees attempting to discredit optometric education. Optometrists are not seeking to become "junior ophthalmologists" but to modernize our scope to reflect current training.

In 1987, Dr. Frank Griffith, who held both MD and OD degrees, opposed SB 113, arguing:

"It is not in the best interest of our citizens to have potent medications prescribed by non-medical practitioners who will be unable to detect, diagnose, and treat their side effects. Do not allow political pressure to provide a short cut to education. This is an untried area and other states do not have a long enough track record to document the safety of allowing optometrists to treat eye disease. Do not let the citizens of Kansas have their eyesight placed at risk by an unproven practice of allowing non-medical practitioners to treat eye disease. "

He also predicted:

"Any time a profession expands its scope of practice, their malpractice cost rises after a short grace period."

However, real-world data contradicts these claims. Malpractice insurers assess risk without bias, using actuarial science. If optometrists were unqualified for these procedures, insurance rates would reflect it. Yet, today, Oklahoma optometrists—who have performed these procedures for three decades—pay the **same** malpractice rates as those in Kansas. Attached is a 2024 rate sheet from Lockton-Affinity, a major malpractice insurer, to confirm this statement.

History repeats itself. Opposition arguments remain the same, and each time, Kansas optometrists have proven them wrong—delivering safe, high-quality care to our patients. Every quote in this letter is sourced from Kansas Legislative archives.

Thank you for your time and for your service to our state.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Wayne Gilmore', followed by a horizontal line.

Wayne Gilmore, O.D.

Lockton Optometry Rates \$1 million / \$3 million												
State	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2022	2023	2024
AK	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$496	\$570	\$570	\$570
AL	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$496	\$570	\$570	\$570
AR	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$496	\$519	\$519	\$519
AZ	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$496	\$570	\$570	\$570
CA	\$420	\$420	\$420	\$420	\$420	\$420	\$420	\$420	\$462	\$462	\$462	\$462
CO	\$580	\$580	\$580	\$580	\$580	\$580	\$580	\$580	\$638	\$734	\$734	\$734
CT	\$1,509	\$1,509	\$1,509	\$1,509	\$1,509	\$1,509	\$1,509	\$1,509	\$1,660	\$1,909	\$1,909	\$1,909
DC	\$1,509	\$1,509	\$1,509	\$1,509	\$1,509	\$1,509	\$1,509	\$1,509	\$1,660	\$1,909	\$1,909	\$1,909
DE	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$496	\$570	\$570	\$570
FL	\$710	\$710	\$710	\$710	\$710	\$710	\$710	\$710	\$781	\$898	\$898	\$898
GA	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$496	\$545	\$545	\$545
HI	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$496	\$570	\$570	\$570
IA	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$496	\$570	\$570	\$570
ID	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$496	\$570	\$570	\$570
IL	\$603	\$603	\$603	\$603	\$603	\$603	\$603	\$603	\$663	\$762	\$762	\$762
IN	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$496	\$570	\$570	\$570
KS	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$496	\$570	\$570	\$570
KY	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$496	\$570	\$570	\$570
LA	\$957	\$957	\$957	\$957	\$957	\$957	\$957	\$957	\$1,053	\$1,211	\$1,211	\$1,211
MA	\$603	\$603	\$603	\$603	\$603	\$603	\$603	\$603	\$663	\$762	\$762	\$762
MD	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$496	\$570	\$570	\$570
ME	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$496	\$570	\$570	\$570
MI	\$603	\$603	\$603	\$603	\$603	\$603	\$603	\$603	\$663	\$762	\$762	\$762
MN	\$580	\$580	\$580	\$580	\$580	\$580	\$580	\$580	\$638	\$734	\$734	\$734
MO	\$580	\$580	\$580	\$580	\$580	\$580	\$580	\$580	\$638	\$734	\$734	\$734
MS	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$496	\$570	\$570	\$570
MT	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$496	\$570	\$570	\$570
NC	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$496	\$570	\$570	\$570
ND	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$496	\$570	\$570	\$570
NE	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$496	\$570	\$570	\$570
NH	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$496	\$570	\$570	\$570
NJ	\$540	\$540	\$540	\$540	\$540	\$540	\$540	\$540	\$594	\$683	\$683	\$683
NM	\$420	\$420	\$420	\$420	\$420	\$420	\$420	\$420	\$462	\$531	\$531	\$531
NV	\$580	\$580	\$580	\$580	\$580	\$580	\$580	\$580	\$638	\$734	\$734	\$734
NY	\$420	\$420	\$420	\$420	\$420	\$420	\$420	\$420	\$462	\$531	\$531	\$531
OH	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$496	\$570	\$570	\$570
OK	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$496	\$570	\$570	\$570
OR	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$496	\$570	\$570	\$570
PA	\$540	\$540	\$540	\$540	\$540	\$540	\$540	\$540	\$594	\$683	\$683	\$683
RI	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$496	\$570	\$570	\$570
SC	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$496	\$525	\$525	\$525
SD	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$496	\$570	\$570	\$570
TN	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$496	\$570	\$570	\$570
TX	\$603	\$603	\$603	\$603	\$603	\$603	\$603	\$603	\$663	\$762	\$762	\$762
UT	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$496	\$570	\$570	\$570
VA	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$496	\$570	\$570	\$570
VT	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$496	\$570	\$570	\$570
WA	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$496	\$570	\$570	\$570
WI	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$496	\$570	\$570	\$570
WV	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$496	\$570	\$570	\$570
WY	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$451	\$496	\$570	\$570	\$570

March 24, 2025

To: Chairwoman Beverly Gossage and Members of Senate Public Health and Welfare Committee

From: Kendra Lowell, OD

My name is Dr. Kendra Lowell and I am originally from Belleville, KS. In May 2024 I graduated from optometry school at Northeastern State University in Tahlequah, OK. I currently practice optometry in Marysville, KS, and I am writing to ask for your support of House Bill 2223 to modernize the scope of practice for optometrists in Kansas. Over the normal course of optometry school I was trained and performed the procedures proposed in the bill, including: laser procedures, injections, and removal of skin lesions. Our classes prepared us with supervised simulations of these procedures and upon completion we had supervised clinical experience on real patients. Twelve states already have legislation that allow optometrists to perform such procedures and several more are pursuing legislation this year.

Kansas will have an increased difficulty recruiting new optometrists if no legislation is passed. In my graduating class at least two people chose not to return to the state of Kansas due to the limited scope of practice. As more states continue to pass the legislation proposed in HB 2223, our state needs to consider the long term effects of delaying the passage of this bill.

Living in rural Kansas, I understand the challenges people face to access healthcare - especially the elderly. From personal experience, my grandma lives in Kansas and travels 120 miles into Nebraska, as this is the closest access to the laser procedure that she needs. For her, this travel distance and crossing state lines would be the same for every procedure included in the proposed legislation. If she lived further west in the state the travel distance could be even longer.

I am confident that the passage of this legislation would improve patients' access to care for Kansas residents. A "yes" vote would also allow for revenue produced from the procedure to stay within our state. With your help, highly trained optometrists can broaden the healthcare system and improve the quality of eyecare available in Kansas by including these much needed procedures within our scope. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Kendra Lowell, OD

Contact Information

Phone: 785-562-2631

Email: drllowell@bluerivereyecare.com

March 24, 2025

To: Senate Public Health and Welfare Committee

RE: Proponent – House Bill 2223

My name is Dr. Carter Morrison. I am an optometrist practicing in Glenwood Springs, Colorado. I am from Colby, Kansas and I am a third-generation optometrist. My grandfather, the late Rep. Jim Morrison, OD, practiced in Colby and also served in the Kansas Legislature. My uncle, the late Neal Carr, OD, practiced in Topeka and my father, Jeff Morrison, OD, practices in Colby and has multiple practices throughout northwest Kansas and northeast Colorado. I am in my first year of practice after graduating in 2024 from Northeastern State University College of Optometry in Tahlequah, Oklahoma.

I am writing today in support of House Bill 2223, which modernizes the optometric scope of practice to reflect current education and training.

The fact that I was not able to perform the procedures outlined in the bill was a significant consideration for me as I decided where I was going to practice after graduation. Despite my strong family ties to Kansas, I wanted to be able to practice to the full extent and scope of my education and training. Colorado recently passed legislation similar to HB 2223, so I chose to practice in that state, where I could be close to family but could also practice full scope optometry (which I was able to perform at during school).

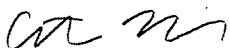
This is a decision that other students are making as well, as many of them choose to stay in Oklahoma or go to another state where they can practice to the extent of their education.

Please consider passing out House Bill 2223. It will provide patients a choice for these in-office procedures and remove unnecessary restrictions on an optometrist's ability to practice to the level of their training.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Carter Morrison, OD



(785) 443-5518

drcartermorrison@gmail.com

Testimony of Natalie Nibert in Support of HB 2223

Before the Senate Public Health and Welfare Committee
of the Kansas State Legislature

March 24, 2025

Thank you, Chairwoman Gossage, Vice Chairman Clifford, Ranking Member Holscher, and Members of the Senate Public Health and Welfare Committee for holding this hearing on this important bill. My name is Dr. Natalie Nibert, and I am an optometrist originally from Wichita now practicing in Kansas City, KS. I am writing in support of HB 2223.

I graduated summa cum laude from Southern College of Optometry (SCO) in Memphis, TN in 2021. I then completed a residency in Pediatric Optometry and Vision Therapy and Rehabilitation in 2022 and earned a Fellowship in the American Academy of Optometry in 2023. Additionally, I completed a certification program for the procedures outlined in HB2223 presented by Northeastern State University College of Optometry in 2023.

At SCO, students begin administering primary care eye exams in their third year while maintaining coursework and preparing for national board exams. Our curriculum included education on laser and advanced procedures, incorporating hands-on training with model eyes. It has been documented in literature that ophthalmology residents receive similar training on model eyes for laser procedures¹. By our fourth year, we engaged in specialized clinical rotations and externships across the country, gaining real-world experience. At SCO's ocular disease department, we had opportunities to observe procedures such as chalazion removal and fluorescein angiography. Optometry schools nationwide have similar externship programs that allow students to gain clinical experience in diverse settings.

During my fourth year, I chose to complete an externship at an OD-MD referral center in Oklahoma, where fourth-year optometry students regularly perform laser procedures under the supervision of an attending OD or MD. Since 1998, Oklahoma optometrists have been legally authorized to perform these procedures. While there I witnessed a highly productive and collaborative partnership between ophthalmologists and optometrists, working seamlessly to provide the best care to patients. When optometrists perform these procedures, ophthalmologists can dedicate more time to complex surgical cases and specialized care, improving overall efficiency. During my externship, I successfully performed laser procedures on live patients. However, upon returning to Kansas to practice, I found myself unable to perform the same procedures I had been trained in and had completed in Oklahoma.

States such as Oklahoma, Kentucky, and Louisiana have established highly competitive externship programs, attracting top optometry students who seek to fully utilize their training. Graduating optometrists are ready for opportunities to perform these procedures to better serve their communities. Providing laser procedures would significantly benefit our patients—particularly those with glaucoma—by providing treatment options that reduce dependence on costly and time-consuming eye drop regimens. These procedures are some of the most effective treatments available for managing glaucoma, improving patient outcomes and satisfaction.

As a Kansas resident, I want to see our state remain competitive with our neighbors, such as Colorado, Oklahoma, and Arkansas in optometric scope of practice. The passing of this bill will help attract and retain talented young professionals, particularly those who seek to practice at the highest level of their training. I encourage you to vote in favor of HB 2223.

Thank you in advance to Chairman Carpenter, Vice Chairman Bryce, Ranking Member Susan Ruiz, and Members of the Committee for your time considering this cause and reading my testimony.

Thank you,

Natalie Nibert, OD, FAAO

References

1. Wen JC, Rezaei KA, Lam DL. Laser Peripheral Iridotomy Curriculum: Lecture and Simulation Practical. MedEdPORTAL. 2020;16:10903.



Chair Gossage and Members of the Committee,

We appreciate this opportunity to submit **written proponent testimony for HB 2223**, which expands the scope of practice for optometrists in Kansas, allowing them to perform additional procedures and use medical devices while updating credentialing and education requirements and establishing a fund for background checks. We hold the following position on HB 2223:

1. Expanding Access to Eye Care, Especially in Rural Areas
2. Reducing Costs and Unnecessary Referrals
3. Keeping Kansas Competitive With Other States

Expanding Access to Eye Care, Especially in Rural Areas

Many Kansans, particularly in rural communities, struggle to access timely eye care due to a shortage of ophthalmologists. This shortage often results in long wait times or the need to travel significant distances for routine eye care.

HB 2223 allows optometrists to perform minor, in-office procedures within their training—such as removing foreign objects, minor laser treatments, and other non-invasive procedures—ensuring more timely care for patients.¹

Reducing Costs and Unnecessary Referrals

Under current law, patients are often referred to specialists for simple procedures that optometrists are fully trained to handle. This creates unnecessary costs for families and burdens an already strained healthcare system. By allowing optometrists to provide these services,

HB 2223 eliminates needless referrals and reduces healthcare expenses while maintaining patient safety.²

Keeping Kansas Competitive with Other States

Several neighboring states, including Oklahoma, Colorado, Wyoming, and Arkansas, already allow optometrists to perform the procedures outlined in HB 2223. Kansas risks falling behind in healthcare accessibility if we do not modernize our laws.

¹ American Optometric Association, "In rural America, opportunity for optometry amid shortfall of ophthalmologists." Available at: <https://www.aoa.org/news/advocacy/state-advocacy/in-rural-america-opportunity-for-optometry-amid-shortfall-of-ophthalmologists>

² Kansas Legislature Testimony, House Health and Human Services Committee. Available at: https://www.kslegislature.gov/li/b2025_26/committees/ctte_h_hhs_1/documents/testimony/20250312_01.pdf

This bill ensures that our state remains competitive in attracting and retaining skilled optometrists to serve our communities.³

HB 2223 is a responsible update that benefits Kansas patients, lowers costs, and improves access to care. I respectfully ask the committee to pass this bill and move it forward in the legislative process.

³ Kansas Legislature Testimony, House Health and Human Services Committee. Available at: https://www.kslegislature.gov/li/b2025_26/committees/ctte_h_hhs_1/documents/testimony/20250312_01.pdf



Proponent Testimony for House Bill No. 2223

Chairwoman Beverly Gossage and Senate Public Health and Welfare Committee

Monday, March 24, 2025

Krista Postai, CEO

Community Health Center of Southeast Kansas

Chairwoman Gossage and Members of the Committee I want to thank you for this opportunity provide testimony in support of HB 2223 on behalf of the state's largest Community Health Center serving more than 80,000 Kansans in the most economically challenged and least healthy region of our state. Our patients disproportionately represent the working poor, the uninsured and those covered by Medicaid and the Health Insurance Marketplace; a growing number are covered by Medicare in our region with almost 20% now over the age of 65. We provide comprehensive medical, dental, behavioral health and support services including transportation regardless of ability to pay. Our goal is to deliver high quality care that is both affordable and accessible.

As many of you are aware, access to healthcare in rural Kansas has been on the decline for decades. All of the eleven counties we serve are health professional shortage areas leaving many with limited access to primary care let alone specialty care. Pittsburg – the population center of the region – has seen our supply of specialists erode over the last 20 years with no hope of replacement.

One of the most basic gaps has been in ophthalmology and, as a result, we depend on a very dedicated group of optometrists to address the vision needs of our patients which are extensive. Unfortunately, state law severely restricts the scope of their practice requiring referrals out of state or to urban areas up to 200 miles away. It can take months for us to get folks to the care they need and, in many cases, they simply go without due to lack of transportation or limited insurance coverage or, in many of our elderly, basic mobility.

While some require an ophthalmologist for their problems, a large percentage need procedures for which optometrists now routinely train including treatment for glaucoma (known as SLT) that lowers eye pressure, follow up to cataract surgery, removal of sties, etc. – all services now performed by optometrists in neighboring states including Oklahoma where we also have health centers. To limit their scope, directly impacts those of us who have chosen to remain in rural Kansas and denies those with limited resources, access to care. It also discourages these well-trained professionals from locating their practices in Kansas and without modernizing, we will likely see the new generation of optometrists opt to practice elsewhere.

Given the severe shortage of ophthalmologists throughout Kansas, it is now time to reserve their skills for the complicated surgical procedures only they can do and let our optometrists better serve their communities similar to what the Legislature has done for advanced practice nurse practitioners. It is time to recognize that Kansas has well trained optometrists who have done an amazing job of protecting the vision of all Kansans in their local communities and are very well prepared to do more.

Thank you for this opportunity to advocate on behalf of our patients, as well as the professionals with whom we rely.

DRS. HAWKS, BESLER, ROGERS & STOPPEL



OPTOMETRISTS

Terry F. Hawks, O.D., F.A.A.O.
Diplomate, American Board of Optometry

L. Gregory Besler, O.D., F.A.A.O.

Jason B. Rogers, O.D.
Diplomate, American Board of Optometry

Jon B. Stoppel, O.D.

March 20, 2025

The Honorable Beverly Gossage, Chair
Senate Committee on Public Health and Welfare
300 SW 10th Street
Topeka, KS 66612

Re: Letter in support of House Bill 2223

Dear Madam Chair and Members of the Public Health and Welfare Committee:

I am writing in support of HB2223 to modernize the optometry scope of practice in the State of Kansas.

In 1995, I graduated from Northeastern State University - Oklahoma College of Optometry and became licensed in both Kansas and Oklahoma. Although I have practiced in Kansas for the past 29 years, I have been authorized by the State of Oklahoma to perform the procedures in HB2223 the entire time, and I could provide these procedures there today. It is important to note that as a student I was educated and trained on the procedures that are included in HB2223.

Although the Kansas optometry practice act did not permit the procedures I was authorized to perform in Oklahoma, my strong desire to return home, be close to family, and serve the citizens of Kansas ultimately guided my decision to practice in Kansas.

I returned with the hope and expectation that the Kansas optometry scope of practice would evolve to align with the education and training I received in optometry school—training that has been standard for optometry students for years. And now that many of my peers are recruiting new graduates to join their practice, they are finding that more and more students are basing their decision about where to practice on the extent to which they can practice to the level of their training.

I respectfully assert that the time has come for the State of Kansas to acknowledge the education and training of optometrists and allow them to practice to the full extent of that education and training to best serve their patients. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Jason Rogers, O.D.

March 24, 2025

To: Senate Public Health and Welfare Committee

RE: Proponent – House Bill 2223

My name is Dr. Jackson Shetlar. I am an optometrist practicing in Salina, Kansas and am in my first year of practice after graduating in May of 2024 from Northeastern State Oklahoma College of Optometry in Tahlequah, Oklahoma.

I am writing today in full support of House Bill 2223, which modernizes the optometric scope of practice to reflect current education and training being given at optometry schools across the country.

As a student, my training for these procedures began in the first semester of my first year of optometry school and culminated in performing them on patients throughout clinical rotations in my fourth year. During that year, my classmates and I were able to safely perform these procedures on a myriad of patients, as have countless classes of optometry students before me since Oklahoma passed scope modernization in 1988 which was similar to what we are trying to achieve here today. The education that I received in the procedures is world renowned, being used for certification across the United States and internationally.

While I am blessed to be able to work and provide optometric care in my home state and hometown, it is a constant source of frustration to me to have the full scope of my training and ability limited by our current dated scope of practice. A frustration shared by many recent optometry school graduates who choose to remain in Oklahoma, Colorado, Arkansas or other states where they can practice to the full extent of their training.

While Salina is fortunate to have many excellent ophthalmologists in our community who we are able to refer patients to for these procedures, allowing me and my colleagues to practice to the level of our training would provide my patients with a choice of where to receive their care, potentially reducing their wait times and allow the ophthalmologists more time in their busy schedules to provide a more specialized level of care that they are trained to do.

I ask that you pass HB 2223 out of committee favorably.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jackson Shetlar", followed by the letters "OD".

Jackson Shetlar, OD

jacks@drsdriverandclark.com