



February 19, 2024

Dear Members of the Senate Health and Human Services Committee,

On behalf of the Minnesota Medical Association (MMA), the state's professional association of physicians, residents, and medical students, I write to share the MMA's concerns with SF 659, a bill related to optometry scope of practice.

SF 659 lifts existing statutory caps on optometric prescribing of oral antiviral drugs, steroids, and oral carbonic anhydrase inhibitors. The limits on optometric prescribing included in current statute serve a very important purpose in protecting the public. These are very powerful drugs that can have significant side effects when used improperly or for extended periods. Renal function, the body's immune response, respiratory function, and liver function can all be impacted when these drugs are incorrectly prescribed.

Optometrists are a critical part of the health care team and are well trained to provide many health services related to eyes and eyesight. However, they do not have the same training as physicians, and specifically of ophthalmologists. An ophthalmologist receives training through medical school and residency that includes much more extensive training on pharmacologic impacts of prescription drugs on the entire body, not just the eye. This extensive training gives ophthalmologists the experience necessary to safely prescribe drugs that can have significant side effects if used improperly.

If the proposed scope of practice expansion were to go forward, the MMA supports defining surgery, as outlined in SF 3758, to be considered as a safeguard against the most concerning health impacts this legislation would have on surgical procedures involving the eye. SF 3758 is necessary to protect patients from the serious negative health outcomes that may occur as a result of SF 659.

We urge you to prioritize the safety of patients and respectfully ask that you oppose SF 659.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Laurel Ries, MD
President, Minnesota Medical Association