

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

Twin Cities Campus

Department of Ophthalmology and Visual Neurosciences

Silvia Orengo-Nania, MD

Professor and Chair Department of Ophthalmology and Neurosciences

Burch Endowed Chair

Mailing Address:

MMC 493

420 Delaware Street S.E.

Minneapolis, MN 55455-0501

www.ophthalmology.umn.edu

Office: 612-626-9349

February 23, 2025

Dear Chair Wiklund and Members of the Senate Health and Human Services Committee:

As Chair of the Department of Ophthalmology and Visual Neurosciences at the University of Minnesota Medical School, I write to urge you to oppose the proposed expansion of optometric scope, included in Minnesota Senate File 1144. I believe that the proposed legislation presents a serious risk to patient care and safety.

Minnesota's current statutes allow optometrists to prescribe topical medications as well as many oral medications, including antibiotics. The prescribing by optometrists of steroids, associated with difficult-to-make diagnoses and serious systemic side effect profiles, is currently prohibited. At present, optometrists are precluded from injecting medications in and around the eye, and from performing surgery, including laser surgery.

Current law should stand as it has served Minnesota well and keeps patients safe. Optometrists are an important part of the health care team and serve to provide refractive care, screening/triage for eye disease, and treatment of many ocular conditions. They are an integral part of the eye care team. However, the education and training of an optometrist is not nearly as comprehensive as that of an ophthalmologist. After rigorous premedical training (four years), and four years of medical school, ophthalmologists train for an additional four years in a demanding residency program focused on the eye and visual system. Many ophthalmologists do seek and further their training through a fellowship for another one or two years. Ophthalmologists are physicians/surgeons with at least 20,000 more hours of supervised, comprehensive clinical and surgical training compared to optometrists. Ophthalmologists have the experience necessary to diagnose diseases properly, to prescribe medications safely, to perform surgical procedures including delivering injections accurately to the delicate structures in and around the eye, and to recognize and mitigate the complications of medical and surgical interventions.

There are many stories of patients misdiagnosed by an optometrist who did not receive the extensive medical and surgical training that an ophthalmologist has. These unfortunate situations arise more commonly in states that allowed expanded optometric scope of practice. Minnesota has very high health care quality standards and vision is arguably the most important of our human senses.

Optometrists are valued members of the eye care team but should not provide complicated medical care nor surgical eye care for patients.

Again, I ask you to vote NO on SF1144. Thank you for your consideration and please help us keep high standards for eye care for the people of Minnesota.

Respectfully,



Silvia Orengo-Nania, MD

Burch Endowed Chair in Ophthalmology

Professor and Chair

Department of Ophthalmology and Visual Neurosciences

University of Minnesota Medical School

