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In support of HB 5760
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Members of the Public Health Committee:

Good morning Senator Handley, Representative Sayers, and members of the committee. My name is Dr. Elizabeth McMunn and I am a member of Speaker Amann's Healthy Kids Working Group subcommittee. In addition, I currently serve as coordinator for the Connecticut Association of Optometrists' **KidSight Connecticut** program. Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to be here today to discuss this matter, one which is very important to me both professionally as a private practice optometrist and personally as a mother. Like all parents, I want my daughter to receive the best health care possible.

Of the five human senses, our visual system is responsible for **eighty percent of the learning** that occurs before the age of twelve. This means if a child is unable to see clearly, or their eyes cannot work together properly, they will have difficulty in school. Imagine... having to work so hard keeping the words on a page clear that you cannot concentrate on understanding and comprehending what you are actually reading. Think about a child who has difficulty changing focus from near to far; a simple task like copying information from the board at the front of a classroom to the paper on their desk becomes a frustrating, inefficient endeavor. Children with visual disorders often develop headaches after reading for only a few minutes. These vision-related headaches are often overlooked during screenings because the child's vision is "20/20" according to the standard eye chart. These are just a few examples of how an otherwise healthy, intelligent child often unnecessarily struggles in school, and in life, due to an undiagnosed vision problem.

Neurological connections between our eyes and brain increase, and continue to strengthen, from before birth until around age seven. During this developmental period, disruptions within the visual system which prevent the brain from receiving a clear and single image will ultimately cause the brain's visual sections to form incorrectly; this unnatural state is called amblyopia. Amblyopia makes it physically impossible for the sufferer to see "20/20" as a result of the malformed connections between their brain and eyes. Studies show that almost five percent of children are afflicted with this type of vision loss. The good news is that amblyopia *is treatable* if detected early, before a child's visual system connections are finalized within the brain.

In January 2005, the Connecticut Association of Optometrists commenced a public education campaign entitled "KidSight Connecticut." Working in conjunction with national programs like InfantSEE, we've begun to raise public awareness about vision threatening conditions such as amblyopia and the importance of thorough eye examinations for our state's children. By mandating a comprehensive eye examination before beginning elementary school, we can begin to treat these devastating disorders earlier, improving the prognosis, and hopefully eradicate amblyopia completely.

As an optometrist, I have seen children come alive when they put on a pair of glasses that clears their vision. I've seen the smiles on their faces when they can finally read a paragraph without struggling. Our children deserve a better quality of life. Thank you again for allowing me to be with you today. Please support House Bill 5760.