

Statement of Edward F. Pinn, O.D.  
before the  
Public Health Committee  
March 5, 2007  
HB 7159

Senator Handley, Representative Sayers and Members of the Committee:

My name is Ed Pinn. I am an Optometric Doctor with 36 years of practice experience in Old Saybrook. I also serve as chairman of the Board of Examiners for Optometry. I am here today in a personal capacity to support House Bill 7159, *An Act Updating the Scope of Practice of Optometry*.

A little background: the Optometric Board of Examiners is the monitoring and regulatory entity that oversees all persons who are licensed in the State of Connecticut to be Optometrists. We are responsible for approving all examinations for this profession, oversee continuing education, and acting on any complaints lodged against a licensed Optometrist.

I want to state for the record that individuals who meet Connecticut's education, training and licensure requirements to be an Optometrist include some of the best practitioners of this specialty in the nation. Optometrists are well-respected members of the medical community and are respected and upstanding members of their local communities.

During my time on the Board of Examiners, I have *not* seen a single complaint alleging malpractice by an Optometrist based on any of the new responsibilities you granted the profession in 1996. The National Practitioner's Data Bank shows 514 malpractice payments made by Optometrists in all states during a 16-year period (1990-2006). By contrast, there were 216,000 cases involving malpractice payments by medical physicians during this same time.

Clearly, this shows that Optometrists practice safely and effectively. A \$2 million malpractice liability policy costs *under* \$ 1,000 per year. Yes, I said *per year*.

I must tell you that I know several individuals who passed the licensing exam, but opted not to establish a practice in Connecticut. I asked them why. Each told me the same thing—Connecticut's laws governing Optometry are overly restrictive. They want to practice to their best ability, and we are not now allowing them to do that in Connecticut.

House Bill 7159 will help address this problem. It modernizes the Optometric Scope of Practice in several "common sense" ways. Let me give you two examples.

- Optometrists treat a condition called Iritis. The current statute requires an OD to refer a patient to an Ophthalmologist if the condition doesn't improve within 72 hours. There is no basis in medicine for that time limit. Iritis might resolve itself in a day. It might take four days. Whatever the case, Optometrists are quite

capable of treating it and making the decision whether or not a patient needs to be referred to another medical entity.

- Optometrists also treat Glaucoma. Right now, an OD can write a prescription for an anti-Glaucoma agent which can effectively reduce intraocular pressure. The existing law created an arbitrary barrier to treatment. HB 7159 eliminates those barriers and allows for continuity of care for our patients. I have several patients who have seen me for 10 or 15 years. Suddenly, I have to tell them that since their disease is progressing, I can no longer treat them. That simply makes no sense. Glaucoma is traumatic enough for patients. We shouldn't make the pain more difficult by forcing them to see a new doctor even though an OD can treat the disease just as effectively.

House Bill 7519 will keep Optometrists on the cutting edge of the profession. We will once again attract the "best and brightest" new people to this profession. That is good for patients and it will be good for our local communities and the State of Connecticut as a whole.

Thank you.