

I am Dr. Leora A. Berns. I am in the private practice of Optometry in Avon, Connecticut. I have been licensed in Connecticut since 1986. In 1992, I was appointed to the State's Board of Examiners in Optometry, where I have served the people of Connecticut for the past 15 years. In addition, I have been a Clinical Examiner on the practical portion of the National Board Examinations since 1995. Since 1997, I have also served on the Clinical Skills Committee of the National Board of Examiners in Optometry. This means that I help to write the examination (in this case, the practical portion of the examination) which optometrists must pass in most states, including Connecticut, in order to practice optometry.

The job of our State Board is to protect the people of Connecticut by ensuring that the Optometrists who are practicing in this state meet the highest requirements available. Although our Board functions in a primarily advisory --rather than regulatory -- role, we are often confronted with cases in which an optometrist would like to move to our state and practice optometry. Although he or she may have been practicing at the highest level possible, our current statutes force them to meet our requirements exactly. This sometimes involves their re-taking certain examinations or 100-hour course work, at a cost of time and money which are prohibitive.

It often happens that one spouse's job is transferred and the other spouse must move also in order to keep the family together. If one of the two is a professional, faced by the difficulty of obtaining a license, then our state could lose not only a good optometrist, but the highly qualified spouse who must reject the job transfer. This is just one scenario in which licensure by endorsement would benefit our state.

The difference between licensure by reciprocity and licensure by endorsement is a subtle one. Reciprocity is a relationship where two Boards of Optometry each agree that their licensure standards are equivalent, or nearly equivalent, and enter into a contractual agreement, granting licenses to applicants from one another's state. This would involve 49 such contracts. In fact, there are no such true reciprocal agreements between any two states in the country.

Licensure by endorsement, on the other hand, implies that the legislators have granted the Board and the Department of Public Health the right to assess the equivalency of an individual applicant's credentials to our own license standards. They don't have to be exactly the same, just equivalent, as long as they are at least as stringent as our own.

§ In my work with the National Board, I have had a chance to speak with practitioners from all over the country. It seems that the level of qualifications that Connecticut requires is one of the most rigorous in the land. Thus, the practitioners who would seek licensure by endorsement would be of the highest caliber possible.

I speak for all the professional members of the State's Board of Examiners in Optometry when I urge you to support the new language regulating the practice of optometry in Statute Section 20-130.