

**Public Health Committee Public Hearing Testimony
February 23, 2015**

Senator Gerratana, Representative Ritter, members of the committee, I am Dr. Jerry Hardison, practicing optometrist here in Hartford. On behalf of the Connecticut Association of Optometrists, I would like to comment on proposed HB 6268, An Act Concerning Pediatric Vision Screening. Rep. Gonzalez is to be commended for keeping the visual welfare of our most cherished youngest citizens in the spot light.

Undiagnosed and untreated vision problems in children are recognized as urgent national public health concerns. This is emphasized in the Accountable Care Act which promotes comprehensive eye exams as an essential benefit in insurance plans. It is estimated that 75-90% of all classroom learning involves the visual system.

Some of the newer screening technologies are much more beneficial than the typical reading of the eye chart in school or at the pediatrician that all remember. They have the ability to help diagnose visual conditions sooner but as in any health screening they are unable to match the thoroughness of a comprehensive exam which looks at other aspects of vision including color vision, visual fields, binocularity, focusing ability and overall eye health. Any screening process must recognize that screening itself does not substitute for a full examination and must have an appropriate system of referral for those children that do not pass.

The value of early childhood vision screenings vs. comprehensive eye examinations has been debated for years. As some of you may recall, quite a few years ago the Connecticut Association of Optometrists proposed legislation mandating examinations for children prior to attending grade school. This was defeated because of inter professional disagreement and concerns regarding financial impact.

With these points in mind we would recommend that this bill be the spark to create a task force charged with studying best practices for vision screening and the role of comprehensive eye examinations and to report back to this committee. The task force should include optometrists, ophthalmologists, pediatricians, nurse practitioners, school nurses and educators. The short sentence of this bill indirectly presents the questions: What is a vision screening? Who should provide them? What is a young age? What is an abnormality? And how do we assure that children who need referrals actually receive the proper care? Thank you for your time and interest.

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