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Statement of Erin McCleary, OD
House Bill 5550 – Education Committee
March 7, 2016

Sen. Slossberg, Rep. Fleischmann and members of the committee:

My name is Erin McCleary. I am a licensed Optometric Doctor and practice in West Hartford and Plainville. I specialize in pediatrics, have practiced for nearly nine years, am board certified and currently serve as Vice President of the Connecticut Association of Optometrists.

I am representing the Connecticut Association of Optometrists today in support of a policy change that is included in Section 6 of House Bill 5550, *An Act Concerning Various Revisions and Additions to the Education Statutes*.

The current law in this area requires children in kindergarten and grades one, three, four and five to have a vision screening each year. If a child fails the screening, then a notice is sent to the parent or guardian of that fact.

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 percent 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. 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 change in law in Section 6 is that the notice I mentioned earlier would expressly tell the parent or guardian that their child needs be examined by an Optometrist or Ophthalmologist. We believe this is necessary since some parents might believe that a visit to their pediatrician will accomplish this. It won't. Pediatricians do not administer an eye examination, and that is what a child needs if they have failed the vision screening.

I would note that a similar provision is the law in Massachusetts (105 CMR 200.400) and Rhode Island (Section 16-21-14).

It is known that the most effective screenings are those that track identified students into care, following up to insure they receive a full eye exam.

I would also like to submit for the record a letter in support of this change by Alan Solinsky, an Ophthalmologic Doctor in West Hartford. As he states:

If a child has failed a vision screening, which tends to be a fairly quick process, then this indicates they may have issues that need further review by an optometrist or ophthalmologist. The parent or guardian should be told this and they should specifically be told that their child needs a further vision examination by an optometrist or ophthalmologist (as opposed to a pediatrician or other doctor). That is the change proposed here and it is a simple and good one.

For the reasons I have outlined, the Connecticut Association of Optometrists supports the new language in Section 6 and we look forward to working with you on this issue as the session proceeds. Thank you.