

January 20, 2022

Re: Oppose Optometric Surgery Bill

To Members of the General Assembly,

I am an ophthalmologist and I reside in Fairfax County, VA. I have spent most of my life living in Virginia, and I have spent my entire professional career at Howard University teaching medical students and ophthalmology residents and taking care of patients for over twenty years. I specialize in glaucoma and cataract surgery, and for 15 years was the ophthalmology residency program director for the department I now chair. From my experience, I can attest to the training ophthalmologists undergo to become competent to perform the laser procedures that optometrists are requesting through legislation, that will be introduced this Session, to perform.

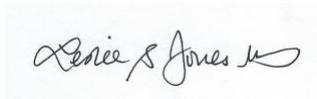
Ophthalmologists complete four years of medical school followed by four years of ophthalmology residency, and become board certified after completing both written and oral board examinations. All but nine months of four years of residency are spent in direct ophthalmology patient care, diagnosing and treating diseases of the eye. Nine of the first 12 months are spent in general medical and surgical care of patients, with residents covering wards with the most acutely ill patients. This fundamental background forms the foundation on which 39 additional months of supervised patient care involving detailed instruction and performance of complex surgical procedures. All this training is acquired in medical schools and residency programs with standards set in part by the public through accrediting bodies, for example the Liaison Committee on Medical Education and the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME). Ophthalmologists also participate in maintenance of certification with annual continuing medical education activities. Medical educators and the public have worked hard to set the standards to ensure quality health care.

I currently sit on the ACGME ophthalmology residency review committee (RRC) that sets these standards for ophthalmology programs across the country. My views do not represent the views of the ophthalmology RRC or the ACGME, but I can certainly attest to ophthalmology program requirements and the rigor of program review.

Optometric training is simply not comparable. After receiving at a minimum three years of postsecondary education, completion of four years of optometry school, and passing an optometric board exam, optometrists can practice. There is no requirement for four years of college, four years of medical school or four years of ACGME accredited residency. Yet optometrists are asking for legislation to perform surgical procedures developed by ophthalmologists who have the background and training to understand the medical health of the entire patient and the surgical competence to know what procedures are medically necessary, when they should be appropriately performed, and how to manage unexpected or adverse events.

The General Assembly has upheld the prohibition of surgery including laser surgery and the performance invasive procedures by optometrists and non-physicians in the past, and I believe it is in the best interest of Virginians that eye surgery is performed by ophthalmologists.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Leslie S. Jones MD", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Leslie S. Jones, MD
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