

**Statement of the Pennsylvania Optometric Association on HB 2727, PN 4234  
Presented to the House Professional Licensure Committee  
October 23, 2008**

Chairmen Sturla and Adolph, and members of the House Professional Licensure Committee, I am pleased and honored to present this testimony on behalf of the Pennsylvania Optometric Association. I am Charles J. Stuckey, Jr., OD, Executive Director for the Pennsylvania Optometric Association.

The Pennsylvania Optometric Association represents approximately 1300 licensed Doctors of Optometry, practicing in nearly every county in the Commonwealth, serving as the "family eye doctor" for the vast majority of Pennsylvania citizens. In many areas of the state optometrists are the ONLY full-time eye care providers. We provide independent, full-scope primary eye care, in cooperation with our physician colleagues.

POA does not see the need for this legislation, particularly as it applies to optometrists. The bill provides no statutory findings that identify a problem that is being addressed by the legislation, so we are left to conjure as to the reasoning behind it. There must be some thought that having this identification will in some way affect a patient's willingness to be seen by that individual. This seems to leap to conclusions that are simply not based in fact or evidence.

POA is well aware that patients have a choice of eye care professionals from whom to receive their eye care, be it an optometrist or an ophthalmologist. We are not aware that there is mass confusion among the general public regarding the respective professions, though they do provide similar services. In fact, in the case of optometry, the current law already provides a number of ways Doctors of Optometry must differentiate themselves from medical doctors. Misrepresenting themselves is already against the law and subject to prosecution by the State Board of Optometry. Both professions also employ a variety of assistants to facilitate care. We believe that patients are aware of whom they are seeing when they are in their eye care provider's office, and have made a conscious choice of practitioner when they are there. A simple introduction is generally made if a new doctor or staff is added and is meeting the patient for the first time. This legislation does not require unlicensed staff to wear the badges, just the practitioners, whose name in many cases is on the door as the patients walk in to the optometrist's office. Once inside, patients can also view the optometrist's diplomas and license, generally displayed prominently.

One other requirement in the bill is of concern. The bill requires practitioners to where badges "... when engaged in face-to-face contact with the public in a professional capacity." Like other health care providers, optometrists come in contact with the public all the time, at soccer games, accident scenes, vision screenings, when giving lectures, etc. Is it the intent of this bill that practitioners **always** wear a badge, on the off-chance they will meet members of the public?

POA is unaware of this legislation having been enacted in any other states, so we cannot judge its efficacy, though we understand there have been similar bills introduced in a couple of states. We suggest holding off on passing this legislation until other states have tried it.

There is no funding suggested in this legislation, so we assume that the costs to the Boards to issue these licenses will be paid from the Boards' budgets, taking precious dollars away from the Boards' ability to investigate and prosecute wayward licensees and persons practicing a profession without a license. This does not seem to be good public policy.

In closing, the Pennsylvania Optometric Association fully supports the rights of patients to know who is providing them care. However, we are at a loss to understand what problem is being fixed by requiring the wearing of a badge. Thank you for the opportunity to provide our input on this issue.

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