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Members of the Optometry Technical Review Committee:

As both an optometrist and an ophthalmologist in Kentucky, a state that in 2011 passed an expanded scope of optometric practice bill that included Selective Laser Trabeculoplasty (SLT), I believe I can add a unique perspective for you.

I am a 1976 graduate of Indiana University School of Optometry. After practicing optometry for three years in an era in which optometrists could not even use eye drops for diagnostic purposes let alone therapeutics, I went on to University of Cincinnati College of Medicine, graduating with an MD degree in 1983. I completed my ophthalmology residency training at University of Louisville in 1987 and practiced ophthalmology in a private practice that I started in Louisville from that time until last year. I continue to practice by teaching ophthalmic surgery to residents at the University of Louisville. I have worked closely with community optometrists throughout my 35 years, and established optometric externships and an optometric residency within my practice. In this way, I have been able to witness and assess the tremendous advances in optometric education over a long period of time.

There are many reasons why Nebraska (as well as all states) should expand optometric scope of practice to include SLT and other procedures. First and foremost, today's optometrists have extensive knowledge of ocular disease that I didn't get in my optometric education back in the 1970s. Ophthalmologists may argue that optometrists do not and claim a general medical education is required. While that may be true regarding some diseases and procedures, it is not with regard to SLT. Optometrists are well versed in diagnosing and treating glaucoma and already possess the equipment and knowledge to examine and evaluate the anterior chamber angle—the site in which the SLT laser beam is directed.

Ophthalmologists also may argue that there is a risk of harm to patients by allowing optometrists to perform this procedure. This is not true as evidenced by the fact that I am unaware of any malpractice suits against optometrists in Kentucky in the eleven years since our state's bill was passed and malpractice insurance premiums for optometrists have not risen as a result. Malpractice insurance cost for optometrists in Kentucky is well less than 10% that of what ophthalmologists pay. Surely the insurance industry would have raised optometric insurance premiums if there were such a risk.

Ophthalmologists may argue that there is no need for optometrists to perform these procedures. Again, this is not true. Glaucoma is more common in older individuals, so, as baby boomers grow older, there is an increased need for medical and surgical eye care services. Furthermore, there is becoming a shortage of ophthalmologists needed to perform cataract, surgical glaucoma and retina procedures. By granting

optometrists the ability to perform simple procedures like SLT, time will be freed up for ophthalmologists to do the more advanced procedures for which they are best suited. Additionally, with ophthalmologists concentrated in the larger cities, access to eye care by rural patients is better served by allowing optometrists in these areas to care for them. In fact, many rural patients will go without the care they need if it is not provided closer to their homes and, in the case of glaucoma, risk significant vision loss or blindness.

Ophthalmologists do not have a monopoly on education or skills. Clearly some additional education and skills training will be necessary prior to the implementation of these new procedures by optometrists in Nebraska as it was in Kentucky. I have had the pleasure to teach and proctor many Kentucky optometrists in laser procedures, including SLT. None were certified before they demonstrated that they could proceed in a safe manner. This, of course, contributed to the lack of malpractice suits and the continued low insurance premium rates.

As you can tell, I wholeheartedly support the proposed expanded optometric scope of practice bill. I encourage you to move forward to create the positive outcomes in Nebraska that we've seen in Kentucky. If you have any questions for me, I can be reached at [dbennettodmd@TWC.com](mailto:dbennettodmd@TWC.com) or by calling me at (502) 773-1415.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D. Bennett', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Donald W. Bennett, O.D., M.D.