



Good morning, members of the Technical Review Committee, I'm Dr. Dave Watts. I'm a retired physician from Omaha, and the current President of the Nebraska Medical Association. On behalf of our nearly 3,000 physician members across the state, thank you for the opportunity to express the NMA's opposition to this credentialing review proposal by the Optometric Association.

The NMA's mission is to "Advocate for Physicians and the Health of all Nebraskans." Our opposition to this proposal is rooted in our goal to protect the health and safety of patients—whether they live in a rural or urban part of our state.

The NMA and our member physicians believe this proposal would have a harmful impact on patient safety in Nebraska. While the applicant group may be painting a picture of a simple, harmless, easy to perform procedure, we need to call it what it is: surgery on a patient's eye. With surgery comes inherent risks, risks to which optometrists are simply not educated, trained, or prepared to respond adequately.

Surgical risks must be considered before surgery is performed. That is partly why the extensive medical education and training of ophthalmology surgeons on real patients is so crucial. NMA's concern for patient safety is that optometrists, during their education and training for this procedure, rarely treat and interact with actual patients. A weekend course, with practice on a plastic model, is just not adequate preparation to perform a surgical procedure on a live human eye. Nor is a short training course adequate to gain the patient experience necessary to handle potential surgical complications.

The applicant group argues that support for their proposal will increase access to care in rural settings. However, access to care should not lower standards of care. We should not deprive residents of rural areas from treatment by those fully and appropriately trained to perform surgery. Rural Nebraskans can—and have been—safely receiving SLT from appropriately trained ophthalmologists in locations across the state.

Permitting this elective, non-emergent surgery to be performed by optometrists places the health—and vision—of Nebraska patients at unnecessary risk.

For these reasons the Nebraska Medical Association strongly opposes this proposal.