



Good morning, members of the Technical Review Committee. My name is Dr. Dave Watts, retired physician from Omaha and current President of the Nebraska Medical Association, representing nearly 3,000 physicians across the state. I am here today to express the NMA's opposition to this credentialing review proposal by the Optometric Association. The mission statement of the NMA is to advocate for physicians and the health of all Nebraskans. Our opposition to this proposal is rooted in our goal to protect patient health and safety—no matter 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 the picture that this is a simple and harmless procedure, we still have to call it what it is: surgery. With surgery comes inherent risks that optometrists are not properly educated and trained on how to respond and react to. There are also risks to consider before the surgery is even performed; risks which are best suited for only those with medical education and training to examine and eliminate prior to surgery. Our concern for patient safety is exacerbated by the fact that optometrists rarely treat and interact with actual patients during their education and training for this procedure. A weekend course and practice on a plastic model cannot adequately prepare someone to perform a surgical procedure on the human eye.

The applicant group has urged support for their proposal on the basis of increasing access to care in rural settings. However, access to care should not mean access to lowered standards of care. We should not deprive residents of our rural areas from obtaining treatments by those 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 opposes this proposal.