



March 30, 2009

Dear Senator Schneider, Representative Smith and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Business, Research and Economic Development:

RE: Letter in Opposition to L.D. 683, *An Act to Promote Cost-effective and Broad-based Vision Care for Maine Citizens by Clarifying the Scope of Prescription Authority by an Optometrist*

As an ophthalmologist, a medical doctor (M.D.) who specializes in the medical and surgical treatment of eye disease, I urge you to oppose L.D. 683 which would allow optometrists to prescribe any drug in schedules III, IV, and V, whether topical, oral, or even injected. I am unable to attend the hearing on Tuesday, March 31, 2009.

These medications include analgesics, antibiotics, decongestants/anti-allergenic, antihistamines, antivirals, and other categories of drugs such as botox. By allowing optometrists, who are not physicians, to prescribe such a wide variety of medication, the proposal ignores the awesome responsibility accepted by physicians as we use and prescribe these medications – including diagnosing the cause of severely compromised conditions of the eye along with the significant responsibility in managing any complications resulting from a medication's actions and interaction with other drugs.

Maine citizens depend on the good judgment of the Legislature to protect their health and well-being. By not requiring any additional clinical training in pharmacology prior to allowing additional prescribing by persons without proper training to do so, legislators would be placing the eye care of their constituents in danger.

There is no need to authorize untrained optometrists to prescribe drugs beyond what is allowed under current law. When ophthalmologists do prescribe, it is usually for significant medical conditions beyond the education and training of an optometrist. In contrast, optometrists see patients who have generally healthy eyes. Accordingly, there is an even smaller likelihood that optometrists need this increased prescribing authority.

I greatly value the services that optometrists provide. I am sorry to have to write a letter like this, but the eyes of Maine citizens are too precious to remain silent.

Please vote against L.D. 683 unless it is significantly amended in a way that limits the scope of practice to services that optometry have education, training, and experience to treat.

Sincerely yours,

A. Jan Berlin, M. D.
Medical Director, The Low Vision Clinic

A Statewide Focus on Maine's Visually Impaired Since 1905.

189 Park Avenue, Portland, Maine 04102
207.774.6273 • 800.715.0097 • fax 207.774.0679 • www.TheIris.org