



North Carolina Opticians Association

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Via Hand Delivery

Senator Fletcher Hartsell
Co-chair Joint Administrative Procedure Oversight Committee
300 N. Salisbury Street, Room 627
Raleigh, NC 27603-5925

Representative Jonathan C. Jordan
Co-chair Joint Administrative Procedure Oversight Committee
N.C. Senate
300 N. Salisbury Street, Room 420
Raleigh, NC 27603-5925

Dear Senator Hartsell and Representative Jordan:

Thank you for this opportunity to comment on the proposed bill from the Subcommittee on Occupational Licensing being considered today.

I am Secretary-Treasurer of the North Carolina Opticians Association. I have been in the optical profession for over 35 years. This profession has given me and countless other Licensed Opticians in this State the opportunity to assist the public in obtaining their best visual outcome by eyeglasses spectacles and contact lenses. On behalf of Opticians across this State, I implore the APO to reconsider proposed legislation to merge the NC Opticians Board into the NC Optometric Board for several reasons. First, I believe the primary reason the NC Opticians Board is under scrutiny is due to fiscal concerns. The financial issues that have arisen stem from a lack of funding related to not having had a fee increase in over 10 years. Licensed Opticians across this State support the fee increase. The reasonable fee increase proposed by Senate Bill 525 from the 2015 legislative session was held up for some undisclosed reason (as well as several other bills). The NC Opticians Board is currently meeting its obligations and the fee increases requested are minimal and will restore fiscal stability to this Board. The Opticians Board has been a viable entity which has operated with virtually no cost to taxpayers for over 50 years and can continue to be so with adoption of SB 525.

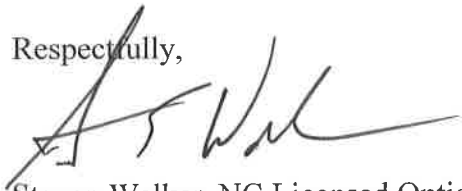
The second practical reason is that both Optometric and the Ophthalmology groups in this State are not in favor of the move to place the Opticianary Board under supervision of the Optometry Board. I understand from their respective attorneys that these two related groups oppose the proposed consolidation. They view this consolidation as unnecessary. They do not want to be involved in oversight of our profession.

Finally, I must address this issue of deregulation of occupational licensing as it relates particularly to our license. In this current climate of deregulation, being pushed by certain factions both in our State government and nationally, I believe it is false economy to taxpayers to deregulate our profession as well as others being considered at this time. During a meeting last spring with Joseph Coletti, who led the NC GEAR Study which evaluated NC government efficiency, I cited the study he had helped lead. Regarding specifically our Board, I asked him what the savings to the taxpayers of North Carolina would be if our Opticians Board were deregulated or even abolished. His answer was NONE.

This profession already has several reasonable routes to obtaining a license in North Carolina. Another part of SB 525 addressed changes in the length of apprenticeship and a few other changes to make it even easier to gain an Optician's License. This State has been very progressive in this area. The classroom component of Optician licensure here in North Carolina is attainable at most any community college. I became an apprentice in 1976, and worked at that time for 5 years (currently 3 ½ years, and SB 525 proposes changing to 2 ½ years), then sat for the Opticians State Board and successfully passed. I did not view it as a burden, but rather a great opportunity. It gave me the opportunity to use the technical skills obtained during my apprenticeship to serve the public. Licensed Opticians do not view this profession as merely a job. Most of us have invested our life into serving the citizens of this State.

On behalf of the Licensed Opticians in this state, I respectfully ask that your Committee reconsider the proposed legislation and help keep the Opticians Board an independent Board. Please help us maintain the reasonable standards of excellence that have allowed us to benefit the citizens of this State.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Steven Walker', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Steven Walker, NC Licensed Optician 573
Secretary-Treasurer, North Carolina Opticians Association

cc: Members of Joint Administrative Procedure Oversight Committee