



Massachusetts Society of Optometrists

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May 1, 2015

Honorable Kate Hogan, House Chairwoman
Honorable Jason Lewis, Senate Chairman
Joint Committee on Public Health
State House, Room 130
Boston, Massachusetts 02133

Dear Chairwoman Hogan, Chairman Lewis and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of the over 700 members of the Massachusetts Society of Optometrists (“MSO”), I write in strong support of House Bill 1980, An Act to Establish a Vision Care Registry, and House Bill 1886, An Act Requiring the Department of Public Health to Issue a Report on Vision Screening for Children.

As you may know, the Massachusetts Legislature enacted Chapter 181 of the Acts of 2004 to require that parents or guardians of children entering kindergarten certify that their child has passed a vision screening test within the previous 12 months. The purpose of this law was to utilize vision screenings as a tool for diagnosing potential impediments affecting a child’s health, generally, and ability to learn, specifically. Accordingly, children failing their vision screening would be referred to an optometrist or ophthalmologist for appropriate treatment. Children that do receive treatment avoid the long-lasting, detrimental impact that the vision problem would have had on that child’s academic performance. In fact, certain vision conditions can be fully corrected if caught early enough, whereas, if left undiagnosed, can become permanent. Despite the referral requirement, however, many children do not receive the needed corrective lenses or treatment due to a failure to follow through on the referral.

House Bill 1980 is designed to address that issue Mass. Gen. Laws ch.71, §57 by creating a reporting mechanism that, if necessary, will lead to additional preventative and control measures being implemented to further protect the vision of the Commonwealth’s youngest students. This legislation will also create a Commission of Childhood Vision Screening and Treatment to identify populations in need while also exploring various means for addressing those specific needs. As a result, more students will receive early, preventative treatment and be able to avoid the adverse impact of undiagnosed vision conditions, including poor performance in school and permanent vision problems. While House Bill 1980 provides a more comprehensive mechanism for addressing the eye care needs of school age children, House Bill 1886 will require the Massachusetts Department of Public Health to take the initial step of identifying the basic numbers of school age children in need of further eye care or vision training.

House Bill 1980 / House Bill 1886

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Optometrists work with children on a daily basis through the Infant SEE program, community health centers or through private practice. In so doing, optometrists gain a wealth of knowledge and experience about the treatment of eye and vision conditions, but also develop an understanding of the importance of recognizing vision conditions at a young age. House Bill 1980 can play a key role in improving services for the treatment of eye and vision care conditions in children. For the benefit of school aged children throughout the Commonwealth, the MSO urges that the Committee issue a favorable report on House Bill 1980 and House Bill 1886.

I appreciate your consideration of this important matter. If you should have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Richard Lawless". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "R" and "L".

Richard Lawless
Executive Director