

April 25, 2023

The Honorable Jay Inslee  
Governor  
Office of the Governor  
Washington State  
PO Box 40002  
Olympia, WA 98504-0002

**Re: AMA Request for Veto of SB 5389**

Dear Governor Inslee:

On behalf of the American Medical Association (AMA) and our physician and student members, I am writing to strongly encourage you to **veto Senate Bill (SB) 5389** which allows optometrists to perform surgical procedures on the eye and broadens the range of pharmaceuticals an optometrist can prescribe. Surgery on the human eye is not risk-free nor “uncomplicated.” Complex surgical procedures, such as invasive eyelid surgery, as SB 5389 would allow optometrists to perform, require specialized education and training, as well as medical supervision during surgical preparation, performance of the procedure, and postoperative patient care. Such training must include not only the technical skills needed to perform the procedure itself, but also the medical knowledge needed to analyze when surgery may or may not be clinically indicated.

Surgery on or around the human eye is not something to be taken lightly. Patient safety and the highest quality of care demand that individuals who perform invasive procedures have the appropriate medical education and training. Ophthalmologists’ training includes four years of medical education and an additional four to six years in postgraduate residencies and fellowships. During that advanced training, physicians learn the most effective, safe, and appropriate treatments, including surgical, pharmacologic, and other interventions based on each patient’s unique medical needs. In sharp contrast, optometric education and training rarely go beyond the postgraduate level and are focused almost entirely on examining the eye for vision prescription, dispensing corrective lenses, and performing some eye screening functions.

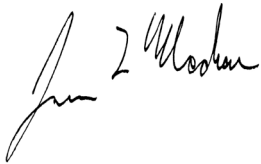
Optometrists do not possess the comprehensive medical knowledge necessary to safely perform surgical procedures on patients. Students of optometry are not exposed to standard surgical procedure training, aseptic surgical technique, or medical response to adverse surgical events as a part of their education. In fact, unlike ophthalmologists, optometrists are not required to partake in any postgraduate advanced training (ophthalmologists mandatorily pursue four years of residency training, with some continuing to complete specialty fellowship training), where the knowledge and skills learned during school are clinically applied through actual patient care under the supervision of a licensed professional. This distinction is critical. In short, there is no substitute for the level of experience and education attained by a fully trained ophthalmologist.

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The AMA respectfully **asks you to veto SB 5389**. There is no way to safely perform surgical procedures without the comprehensive education and years of clinical training received in medical or osteopathic school. We believe that SB 5389 would be a dangerous proposition for patients in Washington and would make Washington an outlier, not a leader, when it comes to the health and safety of patients.

Thank you for your consideration. If you have any questions, please contact Kim Horvath, JD, Senior Attorney, AMA Advocacy Resource Center, at [kimberly.horvath@ama-assn.org](mailto:kimberly.horvath@ama-assn.org).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jim L. Madara".

James L. Madara, MD

cc: Washington State Medical Association  
American Academy of Ophthalmology