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March 3, 2017

The Honorable Merv Riepe  
Chair  
Health and Human Services Committee  
Nebraska Legislature  
Room 1402  
P.O. Box 94604  
Lincoln, NE 68509

Re: Legislative Bill 391 – **Oppose**

Dear Chairman Riepe:

On behalf of the American Medical Association (AMA) and our physician and student members, I am writing to **oppose** Nebraska Legislative Bill (LB) 391. LB 391 proposes expanding optometrist scope of practice to include a range of services that optometrists simply do not have the education, training and experience to provide. These include the authority for optometrists to perform scalpel surgeries, laser surgeries, intraocular and other injections. This letter will focus on the proposed surgical scope expansion.

Patient safety and quality of care demand that patients be assured that individuals who perform invasive procedures have appropriate medical education and training. Quite simply, safe use of lasers and scalpels requires extensive medical education and training. LB 391 would allow optometrists to perform scalpel and laser surgery on and around the eye after only 16 hours of didactic and clinical coursework for optometrists who graduated before 2012, and no additional education and training for optometrists who graduated after 2012.

Surgery on or around the human eye is not something to be taken lightly. The AMA believes that surgery is the diagnostic or therapeutic treatment of conditions or disease processes by any instruments causing localized alteration or transposition of live human tissue, which include lasers, ultrasound, ionizing radiation, scalpels, probes and needles. All of these surgical procedures are invasive, including those that are performed with lasers. The risks of any surgical procedure are not eliminated by using a light knife or laser in place of a metal knife or scalpel.

In addition, appropriate eye care includes not only training in 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.

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Ophthalmologists' training includes four years of medical education, and an additional three to seven years in post-graduate 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.

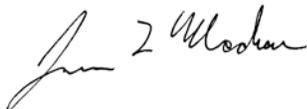
In sharp contrast to the seven to eleven years of ophthalmologic medical education and training, optometric education and training rarely goes beyond the post-graduate level and is focused almost entirely on examining the eye for vision prescription, dispensing corrective lenses and performing some eye 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 post-graduate advanced training (ophthalmologists mandatorily pursue four years of residency training, with some continuing on to 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.

The AMA strongly opposes LB 391 because there is no way to safely perform surgical procedures without the comprehensive education and clinical training received in medical or osteopathic school. The none-to-nominal additional education and training proposed by LB 391 come no here near this standard.

Thank you for your consideration. If you have any questions, please contact Kristin Schleiter, JD, Senior Legislative Attorney, Advocacy Resource Center, at [kristin.schleiter@ama-assn.org](mailto:kristin.schleiter@ama-assn.org) or (312) 464-4783.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "James L. Madara". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

James L. Madara, MD

cc: Nebraska Medical Association  
American Academy of Ophthalmology