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February 17, 2021

TO: Senate Transportation Committee
FROM: Todd Fleischer, CAE
Executive Director
RE: Testimony Regarding Senate Bill 127

My name is Todd Fleischer. I am the Executive Director of the Kansas Optometric Association, which represents optometrists across Kansas. Thank you for the opportunity to submit neutral testimony regarding Senate Bill 127, which deals with online renewal of driver's licenses and vision requirements.

Doctors of optometry are independent primary health care providers who examine, diagnose, treat and manage diseases and disorders of the visual system, the eye and associated structures as well as diagnose related systemic conditions. They examine the internal and external structure of the eyes to diagnose eye diseases like glaucoma, cataracts and retinal disorders; systemic diseases like hypertension and diabetes; and vision conditions like nearsightedness, farsightedness, astigmatism and presbyopia. Optometrists also do testing to determine the patient's ability to focus and coordinate the eyes, and to judge depth and see colors accurately. They prescribe eyeglasses and contact lenses, low vision aids, vision therapy and medicines to treat eye diseases as well as perform minor emergency procedures.

As primary eye care providers in all corners of the state, optometrists are an integral part of the health care team and an entry point into the health care system. They are skilled in the co-management of surgical eye care, such as cataract, glaucoma or retinal procedures, which affects the eye health and vision of their patients and an excellent source of referrals to other health care professionals.

With respect to the vision requirements necessary to obtain a driver's license in Kansas, current law requires individuals to have at least 20/40 vision in one eye to pass the screening done during license renewal at the DMV. If the individual does not pass the screening, they are provided a vision form and instructed to go to an optometrist or ophthalmologist for an exam, and they are required to have at least 20/60 vision in one eye and the vision report from the optometrist or ophthalmologist indicating that their vision should not affect the individual's ability to operate a vehicle safely.

It's important to note that this doesn't take into consideration any chronic health issues, such as diabetes, which could cause an individual's vision to fluctuate throughout the day or other eye diseases that gradually reduce an individual's field of vision over time. This affects a driver's peripheral vision, potentially affecting their ability to see a car or pedestrian approaching from the side.

The current law allows for online renewal every other time but requires that the individual renewing online attest to an eye examination by an optometrist or ophthalmologist within the last year and that they meet the minimum vision standards. The age range is currently 21 to 50, with the limit established originally due to concerns regarding higher incidence of health issues of individuals older than age 50.



With the proposed expansion of this age range from 21 to 65, we do have concerns about the higher likelihood of individuals with health problems renewing online, but have been assured by the department that there are appropriate protocols in place to reduce the risk of someone with significant health issues renewing without verification. We continue to encourage the department to develop protocols so that those with chronic health conditions, such as diabetes or glaucoma, not be allowed to renew online.

For those individuals who cannot meet these requirements or who have a condition which could potentially affect their vision, the department has provided assurances that the existing in-person renewal will continue to be available. Nothing in this bill requires someone to renew online, but it does provide that opportunity.

We are willing to work with our members to provide necessary education about these changes and the additional responsibilities that providers and their staff members will undertake.

Our primary goal remains to ensure the visual welfare of Kansans. We are happy to work with the department to achieve modernization and look forward to the opportunity to develop appropriate fail-safes to make sure that convenience is balanced with public safety protections.

Thank you for your consideration of our comments regarding Senate Bill 127.

