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Optometrist Bill Wins Approval from House **HB 215 Would Allow Better Eye Care, More Treatment Options**

(JUNEAU) – Alaskans would enjoy a wider range of safe, cost-effective eye care services from optometrists under a measure passed by the House today.

House Bill 215, sponsored by the House Labor and Commerce Committee at the request of the optometrists association, seeks to allow optometrists to prescribe medicine to treat eye diseases and other complications related to the eye, said Rep. Lisa Murkowski (R-Anchorage), chair of the committee.

“Alaska has been among the last of the states to allow its citizens the benefit of the significant advances in the practice of optometry,” Murkowski said. “As technology and training has advanced over the years, optometrists have had to return to the Legislature to update statutes in order to practice at the highest standard of care. As the next step in that process, HB 215 will improve the quality of care available to all Alaskans.”

In 1988, Alaska was the 49th state to allow optometrists to use diagnostic drugs. In 1992, Alaska was the 32nd state to authorize prescriptive privilege of topical therapeutic drugs to treat eye diseases, and the state optometry board has received no complaints since that that privilege was granted. While all 50 states allow optometrists to prescribe drugs, only Alaska and 11 other states limit that privilege to topical drugs.

HB 215 would authorize qualified optometrists to prescribe and use medications related to the eye and to treat emergency anaphylaxis, or shock, Murkowski said. It also gives the board of optometry the authority to ensure optometrists demonstrate competency in using such drugs, addressing concerns that prompted the governor to veto a similar bill passed by the Legislature in 2000.

The bill also prohibits injections into the globe of the eye, and allows the board to require additional education for endorsement and to apply limitations to a licensee's endorsement. Additionally, it provides a more concise definition of eye-only treatment scope, limits analgesics to a seven-day supply and systemic drugs to six categories, and requires a mandatory education course and exam on system administration of drugs by an accredited college of optometry.

Notice of reconsideration on the 22-16 vote was given, and it will be taken up Monday, March 18.

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