

Sponsor Statement for HB 215

Optometrists and Pharmaceuticals

An Act relating to the use of pharmaceutical agents in the practice of optometry; and providing for an effective date.

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Optometry is a primary health care profession that examines, diagnoses, and treats conditions of the human eye and visual systems using methods and procedures in accordance with professional training and competency.

Similar to other limited licensed health care professions such as dentists, podiatrists, and nurse practitioners, the methods and procedures used by optometrists are determined in regulation by their respective state boards. Over the years, as technology and training has advanced, optometry has had to return to the legislature to update statutes in order to practice at the highest standard of care.

In 1988, Alaska was the 49th state to enact statutes allowing optometrists to use diagnostic drugs. In 1992, Alaska was the 32nd state to authorize prescriptive privilege of topical therapeutic drugs to treat eye diseases. There have been no complaints to the Alaska board concerning drug prescriptions by optometrists since that privilege was granted. Currently, all 50 states authorize optometrists to prescribe drugs. 38 states, and Washington DC, allow for oral or systemic drugs. Only 12 states, including Alaska, further restrict prescriptive privilege to topical drugs only.

In 2000, SB 78 allowed qualified optometrists to prescribe and use medications related to the eye and for emergency anaphylaxis. Senate Bill 78 was passed by the legislature, but vetoed by the governor, citing inadequate board oversight of training and testing, and concern regarding eye injections.

HB 215 addresses the governor's concerns with the prior Senate Bill 78 by providing for board authority to ensure competency. House Bill 215 also prohibits injections into the globe of the eye, allows the board to require additional education for endorsement, and to apply limitations to a licensee's endorsement. Additionally, House Bill 215 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 by a college of optometry.

HB 215 allows optometrists to practice at the currently accepted standard of care, and to provide improved access to quality, cost-effective eye care throughout Alaska.