



For Immediate Release

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**Senate Appropriations Committee Approves SB 622 to Help CA's Doctor Shortage
*Measure will expand the services doctors of optometry can provide patients***

SACRAMENTO - The Senate Appropriations committee approved SB 622, a bill by Sen. Ed Hernandez (D-Los Angeles) to help alleviate a growing doctor shortage by expanding the services that doctors of optometry can provide.

"We are equipped to fill the provider gap, provide access to important health services and protect consumers," Hernandez said. "It is past time for us to make this policy happen."

The measure was approved earlier by a bipartisan 9-0 vote of the Senate Business, Professions and Economic Development committee.

SB 622 will increase access to health care by expanding the services that doctors of optometry can provide for their patients. This legislation represents a safe and responsible interaction between optometrists and other doctors and California optometrists will undergo one of the most extensive educational training programs. This bill includes a requirement that those who seek laser and minor procedure certifications must have additional training and specialized education upon graduating from optometry school.

SB622 also requires optometrists to undergo the same training requirements and follow the same standards as pharmacists in order to be certified to offer flu, shingles and pneumococcus immunizations for adults.

Doctors of Optometry already perform 81 percent of Medi-Cal eye care. SB 622 will free up ophthalmologists to treat patients who need specialized procedures that only ophthalmologists are trained to perform.

Contrary to common belief, doctors of optometry do more than help the near and far sighted. They provide comprehensive eye health care to patients every day, diagnose and treat serious health problems such as glaucoma, infections and inflammations.

Optometrists identify signs of certain serious diseases including diabetes and cancer and are highly involved in preventive care of their patients for many health conditions.

"Doctors of optometry are an important part of the healthcare field. With the Affordable Care Act, the shortage of doctors continues to grow," said Barry Weissman, president of the California Optometric Association. "Optometrists in California are highly trained healthcare professionals, who already have obtained a doctorate degree from an accredited college of optometry," Weissman said. "This bill puts a premium on patient safety and requires extensive additional education and hands-on clinical training for new certifications, including performing more training procedures on live humans than are required for ophthalmologists."

SB 622 would allow doctors of optometry to undergo extensive, hands-on training and education to obtain special certifications to certain new services. Only those that seek and complete this additional training will be able to perform the following:

- Laser procedures to treat glaucoma and to remove cloudiness on the front part of the eye that commonly develops after cataract surgery.
- Minor procedures including the removal of tiny lesions on the surface of the eyelid
- Provide vaccinations consistent with national guidelines for adults over age 18

Californians already lack access to basic medical care and evidence of a dangerous shortage of healthcare providers has emerged. Millions of patients who are newly eligible for health insurance under the Affordable Care Act are beginning to enter our already overburdened system. Many are being enrolled in the state Medi-Cal program at a time when fewer and fewer doctors are willing to see these patients.

Only 16 out of 58 counties in California have sufficient numbers of primary care doctors. California has optometrists in more than 1000 cities and towns and in all but one county – within driving distance of most Californians and in rural and disadvantaged urban neighborhoods that lack other important medical services.

Gov. Jerry Brown signed a law in 2013 to broaden the scope of public health care that pharmacists can provide to patients, including offering immunizations. It is only natural to allow doctors of optometry to provide patient care to the full extent of their training and abilities.

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