The Optometry Association of Louisiana stands with the Louisiana Rural Hospital Coalition, the Louisiana Primary Care Association, AARP, and the Louisiana Nursing Home Association, among others, to applaud the Louisiana Legislature for overwhelmingly passing House Bill 1065 by Rep. Rogers Pope and signed into law by Governor Bobby Jindal on June 1, 2014.

This landmark legislation tremendously increases access to needed eye care services for our citizens by adding a limited set of eye care procedures to the list of minor surgical procedures which trusted Doctors of Optometry already provide in Louisiana. In fact, every one of these new procedures has been safely and effectively provided for decades to tens of thousands of patients by Doctors of Optometry in other states.

Despite an intense campaign of sensationalism and misinformation to the public and to legislators regarding the bill, broad and bipartisan support emerged as the truth became evident. The US Department of Health & Human Services conservatively projects a 28% shortage in the supply of current providers for these eye care services by the year 2020, with that shortage continuing to increase thereafter. Senior citizens across Louisiana, and especially in rural parishes, already suffer with limited access to these healthcare services, often foregoing needed care as a result, which leads to worsening disease and higher costs to the healthcare system down the road. So who can provide this needed eye care?

Doctors of Optometry currently practice in nearly every parish in Louisiana (which is more than twice the number of parishes the current providers of these services practice in full-time).

Doctors of Optometry already perform minor in-office eye surgeries under the supervision of the Louisiana State Board of Optometry Examiners, a number of which are more complicated than these new procedures.

Doctors of Optometry also already make the clinical decisions for when these procedures are necessary for their patients, and then manage the aftercare for these procedures.

Further, Doctors of Optometry are already trained to perform all the limited procedures this bill would allow, and they would be specifically prohibited from performing procedures they are not trained to do (e.g. those requiring general anesthesia, stitches, incisions into the eye, LASIK, and injections into the eye, among the many other restrictions included in the bill). And despite the education and training they’ve already received, all Doctors of Optometry would have to obtain additional training and certification (i.e. no one would be grandfathered in).

This legislation does not increase insurance coverage to any groups or individuals, is not in any way associated with the Affordable Care Act, and does not bring new patients into the healthcare system because the patients needing these eye care services are already in their doctor’s office.

The bill also does not force anyone to receive care from any particular type of eye doctor. It simply increases access to quality eye care while simultaneously enhancing patient choice.
To reiterate, every procedure in this bill is currently performed by Doctors of Optometry in other states, and has been done so safely and effectively for many years and tens of thousands of times.

In fact, HB1065 is a very rare piece of legislation which:

+ Increases access to quality eye care in Louisiana;
+ Improves healthcare outcomes in those who would otherwise forego this needed care; and
+ Enhances patient choice, while
+ SIMULTANEOUSLY LOWERING HEALTHCARE COSTS.