

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2003 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE

House Bill 441 (Delegate Goldwater, *et al.*)
Health and Government Operations

Optometrists - Quality Eye Health Improvement Act

This bill broadens the practice responsibilities of a therapeutically certified optometrist and gives authority to the Board of Examiners of Optometry to establish quality assurance guidelines for therapeutically certified optometrists and optometric care.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: Establishing an ongoing quality assurance and peer review program for therapeutically certified optometrists could be handled with existing Board of Examiners of Optometry resources. No effect on revenues.

Local Effect: None.

Small Business Effect: Minimal. Optometrists that are small businesses would have broader practice responsibilities and may be able to treat more patients.

Analysis

Bill Summary: The bill allows a therapeutically certified optometrist to administer and prescribe certain oral and ocular medications to patients. It repeals the requirement that an optometrist consult with an ophthalmologist in situations other than where an ocular medication did not elicit the expected response. In addition, it allows an optometrist to conduct other procedures such as ordering appropriate laboratory tests that are within the optometrist's scope of practice. The bill transfers authority from the Maryland Optometric Association and the Maryland Society of Eye Physicians and Surgeons to the Board of Examiners in Optometry to establish quality assurance guidelines and requires

the board to establish an ongoing quality assurance and peer review program for therapeutically certified optometrists and optometric care. The bill prohibits an optometrist from using the titles M.D., physician, or surgeon or any other word that suggests the optometrist practices medicine or ophthalmology.

The board may certify a licensed optometrist as a therapeutically certified optometrist if the optometrist submits to the board evidence that: (1) the optometrist has passed a pharmacology examination relating to the treatment and management of ocular disease; (2) the optometrist has current CPR certification; and (3) the optometrist has applied for a therapeutic license within three years of graduation with an optometry degree or diploma from an accredited college or school, has successfully completed at least 110 hours of continuing education, or has an active license for therapeutic optometry and has practiced in another state.

Current Law: Therapeutically certified optometrists have limited authority to prescribe or administer ocular medications to patients and cannot prescribe or administer oral medications to patients. An optometrist must consult with an ophthalmologist if a patient has not responded to treatment as expected. The Maryland Optometric Association and Maryland Society of Eye Physicians currently determine quality assurance standards for the practice of optometry.

To obtain certification, a licensed optometrist must submit to the State Board of Examiners in Optometry proof of: (1) successful completion of at least 110 hours of a board approved therapeutic pharmaceutical agents course; (2) passing a pharmacology exam relating to the treatment and management of ocular disease; and (3) current board certification to administer topical ocular diagnostic pharmaceutical agents. These requirements do not apply to an optometrist who has graduated on or after July 1, 1992 from an accredited school of optometry recognized by the board unless the optometrist is not therapeutically certified within three years of graduation. In that case, the optometrist must successfully complete a therapeutic pharmaceutical agents course and pass an exam before he or she can be certified.

Background: There are 809 licensed optometrists practicing in Maryland.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: A similar bill, HB 1174, was introduced in the 2000 session, but was later withdrawn.

Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (Board of Examiners of Optometry), Department of Legislative Services

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lc/jr

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