

SB 186 - FIN - OPTOMETRY - LOS.docx.pdf

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DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

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Maryland Board of Examiners in Optometry
4201 Patterson Avenue
Baltimore, Maryland 21215

2026 SESSION POSITION PAPER

BILL NO: SB 186
COMMITTEE: Finance
POSITION: Support

TITLE: State Board of Examiners in Optometry - Examination Requirements and Time Period for Inactive Status

BILL ANALYSIS: SB 186 (the “Bill”) modernizes Maryland’s optometry licensure requirements by aligning them with the national examination standards. It requires applicants for licensure to successfully pass all sections of each part of an examination as required by the Maryland Board of Examiners in Optometry (the “Board”).

The Bill formalizes the current process for administration of the Maryland State Law (jurisprudence) examination. It removes the mandate for the Board to administer the examination. This update reduces administrative burdens and allows the Board to maintain regulatory oversight.

Additionally, this Bill authorizes the Board to limit inactive license status to no more than six consecutive years.

POSITION AND RATIONALE: The Board respectfully submits this letter in support of **SB 186 – State Board of Examiners in Optometry – Examination Requirements and Time Period for Inactive Status**. This Bill updates the Maryland Optometry Act to reflect the enhanced education, training and assessment standards for optometrists seeking licensure, renewal, reinstatement or reactivation in the State of Maryland.

The organization who administers the national optometry examination is the National Board of Examiners in Optometry (the “NBEO”). In 2023, the NBEO announced that it restructured the national exam and assessment of skills necessary to meet the minimum qualifications for entry into the practice of optometry. Upon review of licensing applications that included the restructured examination administered by the NBEO, the Board concluded that its current licensing standards are obsolete. To account for the recent changes to the examination and

assessments, the Board supports an amendment to the current statute that requires applicants for licensure to pass all sections of each part of an examination as determined by the Board.

The proposed language accommodates potential changes in the entity administering the exam as well as future changes to the exam itself. It also empowers the Board to promote high professional standards in the practice of optometry. This ensures that Maryland licensees are equipped to provide high-quality optometric care that reflects current and emerging developments in education, training, and clinical practice. Most importantly these changes will ensure that the Board continues to fulfill its mission of protecting the health and safety of Maryland residents.

Furthermore, SB 186 establishes an expiration timeframe for licenses placed on inactive status. Current law offers no mechanism for the Board to take action or remove dormant licenses from the inactive roster. The Board is unable to determine whether those individuals relocated to another jurisdiction, are permanently retired from the profession, deceased, or if they are otherwise no longer eligible to practice. As a result, the Board currently has more than 300 licensees on inactive status. Establishing a maximum inactive status period would eliminate an indefinite timeframe, improve licensure oversight, and enhance the Board's ability to maintain accurate and current licensure records in the interest of public protection.

For these reasons, the Maryland Board of Examiners in Optometry respectfully requests a favorable report on SB 186. The Board thanks the Committee for its consideration.

For additional information, please contact Gwendolyn A. Joyner, Executive Director for the Maryland Board of Examiners in Optometry at Gwendolyna.Joyner@maryland.gov or (410) 764-5994; or Lillian Reese, Legislative Liaison, at Lillian.reese@maryland.gov, or 443-794-4757.

The opinion of the Board expressed in this document does not necessarily reflect that of the Department of Health or the Administration.