

years of study, review and hearings. Among its benefits, 131 would increase competition in the medical community and increase the availability and accessibility of citizens to eye care. It would also control, if not decrease, the cost of optical care. Currently, 46 states now expressly authorize optometrists to use pharmaceutical agents and to diagnose diseases of the eye. Moreover, nine states allow optometrists to treat and to diagnose disease of the eye with pharmaceutical agents. Our sister states of Iowa, South Dakota, and Oklahoma allow optometrists to treat eye disorders with pharmaceutical agents the same as in LB 131. It might be interesting to note that Iowa recently passed this bill with the Senate voting 44 to 6 in favor, and the House voting 94 to 2 in favor of the bill. Actually, LB 131 is modest in its scope, but it has great potential benefits for the citizens of Nebraska. There is a definite need for LB 131. The following are five reasons to demonstrate the need for this bill. Nebraska optometrists are the first health care providers to see over 70 percent of Nebraska citizens seeking vision care. This legislation would eliminate the duplication of fees to the patient which now must be referred when minor eye infections, abrasions, and allergic reactions are diagnosed by the optometrist. Those patients would be diagnosed and treated promptly on the initial visit to the optometrist without incurring additional travel expense, time away from work, inconvenience, and professional fees for referrals to another primary care provider. In the rural areas, patients will get treatment for common eye diseases without having to drive several miles to the nearest physician or ophthalmologist. This benefit applies to both the consumer and government supported health care programs such as welfare, Medicare and Medicaid. Optometric manpower will be utilized more effectively to treat the common eye diseases rather than subject the consumer to the less trained and clinically experienced support personnel. For example, physician assistants with two years of training and other medical extenders are often utilized to diagnose and treat visual disorders in rural areas under the legal authority, but not the direct supervision of medicine. Congress has recognized the profession of optometry as a primary health care provider. The statutes of this state need to be updated to conform with the educational and clinical expertise offered by these optometrists who are certified to use therapeutic drugs. In order to provide this top quality eye care Nebraska, optometry must be allowed to compete for