

TALKING POINTS
SB 224 by Senator Chris Elliott

Senator Chris Elliott has introduced legislation that would consolidate the administrative functions of many of the occupational licensing boards in the State of Alabama and place them in a newly created Office of Occupational and Professional Licensing under the Department of Labor. The Alabama Board of Optometry is included in this bill with 37 other licensure boards. We are asking that you contact your Senator and Representative to oppose this legislation.

As the bill is currently written, the Board of Optometry would be forced to assign all its rights, duties, assets, employees, records, liabilities and property to the new Office of Occupational and Professional Licensing Agency. The Commissioner of the Department of Labor will appoint one executive director for all the consolidated boards and that new director would “possess all powers necessary and proper to provide administrative support and oversight to each board” including setting all fees and issuing all licenses. The fees collected will no longer be allocated in an account for the use of the Alabama Board of Optometry but will be deposited into the Occupational Licensing Fund.

The stated purpose of the bill is to create efficiency and cost savings. We strongly believe that the Alabama Board of Optometry is both cost effective and efficient in its current form:

- Having dedicated staff for optometry allows for more efficient decision-making processes and quicker responses to issues that the public or licensees may experience. Optometry-related matters are addressed promptly without being buried under the broader scope of responsibilities that a consolidated licensing agency might have.
- As required by law, the Board undergoes an audit by the Public Examiners office and has had favorable Sunset Committee reports.
- By law, the Alabama Board of Optometry is only allowed to retain a \$200,000 balance at the end of the fiscal year. Any amount collected over that is sent to the UAB School of Optometry to further the education of future optometrists.
- The current Executive Director answers to the members of the Alabama Board of Optometry. If that person is not performing their duties adequately, the Board has the authority to dismiss them. Under this bill, the Board does not have that authority. What will happen if the staff person assigned to the Board does not perform to the level necessary to protect the public?
- Many states with consolidated boards report that the system is terribly inefficient. The experiences range from difficulty getting a call returned, slow processing of licenses and continuing education credit and slow license verification processes. Indiana reported that incorrect information about continuing education requirements for optometrists was allowed to remain on the consolidated boards website for FIVE months, despite repeated notifications to the staff that the information was incorrect.