



April 17, 2019

Chairman Rob Bradley, Vice Chair Wilton Simpson & Members of the Senate Appropriations Committee
Florida State Senate
404 S. Monroe Street
Tallahassee, FL 32399-1100

Dear Chairman Bradley, Vice Chairman Simpson and distinguished members of the Florida Senate Appropriations Committee:

Our coalition, [Americans for Vision Care Innovation](#), would like to flag a critically important issue for millions of consumers and taxpayers in Florida that could be coming before your committee in the next few days; the right to get prescriptions for contact lenses and glasses renewed online.

It has come to our attention that some special interests are trying to use SB 1526, a general telemedicine bill that your committee is currently reviewing, as a vehicle to try to ban ocular telemedicine in the state of Florida, preventing access to eye care for millions of Florida citizens by preventing patients from getting their prescriptions renewed online and from having the ability to get online vision checks.

We strongly encourage you and your committee to oppose any efforts to ban ocular telemedicine via amendment or any other end-of-the-session legislative maneuver and stop this last-minute attempt to take away a vital service that so many Florida residents count on.

Online prescription renewal tests have been offered for nearly four years in Florida and across the nation. During this time, close to one million online prescription renewal tests have been performed using online platforms and at this time we are unaware of a single adverse event, medical malpractice claim, or consumer initiated medical board complaint as a result of using these services.

More than 40 million Americans wear contact lenses and millions more wear glasses including millions of people here in Florida. Florida's contact lens users and glasses wearers are entitled to the greatest possible degree of choice and convenience in the way they renew their lens prescriptions – and at the lowest possible prices. Instead of prohibiting consumers and taxpayers from getting an online prescription renewal for glasses or contacts in Florida, Florida legislators should be working to help their constituents get access to more accessible, more affordable prescription renewals.

Americans for Vision Care Innovation is a bipartisan coalition of taxpayer advocates, consumer groups, think tanks, and innovative companies working with leading eye doctors who have joined together to ensure consumers across the country have access to the latest cost-saving and time-saving eye care technologies. The companies that have joined our coalition compete against each other in the marketplace, but are united in support of the use of telemedicine for vision care and online prescription renewal.

As you consider this ban on ocular telemedicine, here are some other key facts you should know about online prescription renewal services for glasses and contact lens wearers:

- Consumers must have a prescription from an eye doctor in order to use these services initially. **These online technologies are designed to help get prescriptions renewed, not to replace comprehensive eye exams.** For millions of Americans, their prescription changes very little between the ages of 18-50, and the American Academy of Ophthalmologists (the world's largest association of eye physicians and surgeons) recommends that healthy adults under the age of 40 receive an in-person eye exam every 5 to 10 years; among older patients, the recommended interval is 4 years or less. This means that for many of your constituents, there is no need to return to a provider's office on an annual basis simply to renew a contact lens or glasses prescription.
- **These new services are easy to use and are available 24 hours a day.** Your constituents no longer have to rush across town, drive for miles to the nearest city or take off work to get a prescription renewed – or worse,

travel for hours if they live in a community with no eye doctors. These services are also generally far less expensive for consumers than visiting an eye care provider in person.

- Customers who use these services go through eye health screenings as part of the process and their online prescription renewals are reviewed and approved by ophthalmologists and optometrists, who are specifically licensed to practice in Florida.
- **Ophthalmologists and other members of the medical community generally oppose bans on the use of telemedicine for vision care and online vision tests.** They believe new technologies can be used safely when doctors have oversight and banning them could severely jeopardize the development of vision saving and lifesaving technologies to treat diseases.
- **The FTC recently weighed in with concerns about legislation in several states that attempted to ban ocular telemedicine,** saying that banning telemedicine would limit a consumer's ability to access eye care services and could raise the cost of eyeglasses and contact lenses.

These last minute attempts to ban online prescription renewal in Florida are especially worrisome for Florida's large Hispanic community. Two of our coalition's most active members, the League of Latin American Citizens (LULAC) and the National Hispanic Medical Association (NHMA), have noted that ocular telehealth services are especially important to Hispanic communities that often suffer from a lack of access to medical care. A 2016 study in the medical journal *JAMA Ophthalmology* found that only 59 percent of Hispanics in their study received an eye examination in the past two years and 12 percent had difficulty obtaining needed eye care in the past year.

Online vision checks and exams are more convenient, accessible and affordable than getting vision checked at the mall or your local doctor's office. Many Florida families live in communities that don't have optometrists or ophthalmologists conveniently located in their neighborhood or they work hours or jobs that make it nearly impossible to get an in-person appointment in a doctor's office. Yet, a July 2016 Pew Poll found that more than 94 percent of Hispanics do have access to the internet via a smartphone or tablet. It doesn't make sense that the Florida Senate would pass a bill that would deny Hispanic families and all families in Florida the right to check their vision and renew their prescription wherever and whenever they want.

We strongly believe that Florida legislators who have all the facts about online prescription renewals and online vision checks will make the right choice for their constituents and reject any amendments or other efforts to ban such services.

We are happy to speak with you and your staff in more detail at any time if you have questions about online prescription renewal or the information we present in this letter.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Americans for Vision Care Innovation

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