



March 10, 2020

Speaker Mattiello
Majority Leader Shekarchi
Minority Leader Filippi
House Corporations Chair Jacquard
House Corporations First Vice Chair Johnson, Jr.
House Corporations Second Vice Chairman Morin

State of Rhode Island General Assembly
82 Smith Street
Providence, RI 02903

Cc: House Corporations Committee

Dear Speaker Mattiello, Majority Leader Shekarchi, Minority Leader Filippi, Chair Jacquard, First Chair Johnson, Jr, and Second Vice Chair Morning,

It is deeply troubling that once again the rights of Rhode Islanders who wear contact lenses and glasses are under attack in the General Assembly. H 7767, introduced late last week and referred to the House Corporations Committee for a hearing on March 10, is a dangerous piece of legislation that restricts the rights of consumers and taxpayers to get an online prescription renewal for glasses or contacts in Rhode Island and severely jeopardizes Rhode Island's growing reputation as an innovator when it comes to health care technology and policy. Even though most of its provisions serve the interests of the optometrist lobby, this one-sided bill will also lead to higher costs, more delays and hassles and worse vision care for Rhode Island consumers.

Online prescription renewal tests have been offered across the country and here in Rhode Island for close to four years. Millions of online prescription renewal tests have been performed across the country 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.

For the past three years, our coalition, Americans for Vision Care innovation, a bipartisan coalition of consumer and taxpayer groups, think tanks, and vision care companies who compete against each other in the contact lens marketplace. representing the rights of the 46 million Americans who wear contact lenses, has worked closely with leading consumer, civic and medical organizations here in Rhode Island to protect the rights of consumers to get prescriptions for contact lenses and glasses renewed online.

H 7767, the so-called "Consumer Protection in Eye Care Act, is modeled on legislation that was introduced, but failed to move in prior legislative sessions. It neither benefits consumers nor protects their rights. In fact, H7767 would reduce access to vision care by preventing most consumers from getting their prescriptions renewed online and from having the ability to get online vision checks.

It will especially hurt working families who work swing shifts or multiple jobs and can't get to an eye doctor's office during "normal" business hours. Online vision checks give consumers and taxpayers the option to do their vision checks at a time that is convenient to them and in the privacy of their own home and the comfort of knowing their checks are reviewed by a licensed ophthalmologist. These online services also tend to be much less expensive than what consumers are charged in the optometrist's office.

H 7767 also hurt Rhode Island taxpayers who cover the insurance benefits of state employees would be denied cost savings, as well as other efficiency benefits to government programs that telemedicine can provide. For example, as our nation and state confront the coronavirus, the last thing we should be doing is reducing access to telemedicine.

Finally, H 7767 jeopardizes Rhode Island's ability to attract new technology and telemedicine businesses to the state. Rhode Island may be a small state in terms of geography, but it has an outsized reputation as a leader when it comes to telemedicine, connected care, and entrepreneurial innovation.

Rhode Island 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. On behalf of them and their families, we urge you to reject H 7767.

We strongly urge you to reject this bill and work with us to increase vision care access and choice across the state.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Americans for Vision Care Innovation

