



March 16, 2021

House Health, Education and Welfare Committee Chair McNamara
House Health Education and Welfare Committee Second Vice Chair Phillips
Members of the Rhode Island House Health, Education and Welfare Committee

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

Cc: Speaker Shekarchi, Majority Leader Blazewski, Minority Leader Filippi

Dear Chair McNamara, Second Vice Chair Phillips and the Distinguished Members of the House Health, Education and Welfare Committee,

It is once again with deep disappointment that 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, must reach out in strong opposition to yet another bill this year that would ban ocular telemedicine in the state of Rhode Island, H 5612.

For the past four years, our coalition has been fighting on behalf of the rights of Rhode Islanders who wear contact lenses and glasses. H 5612, the so-called "Consumer Protection in Eye Care Act," neither benefits consumers nor protects their rights. In fact, it would reduce access to vision care by preventing most consumers from getting their prescriptions renewed online. This one-sided bill, which effectively confers an artificial competitive advantage to optometrists, will lead to higher costs, more delays and hassles, and worse vision care for Rhode Island consumers.

This bill is especially perplexing after what we all experienced during COVID-19. We have seen firsthand over this past year fighting the pandemic how critically important telemedicine is for patients, families, and taxpayers. With optometrists' offices closed and restrictions on indoor gatherings, Rhode Islanders who wear contacts and glasses were more reliant than ever on ocular telemedicine. The convenience of getting your prescription renewed at home literally helped the people of this state see a brighter future. This bill would try to take this important resource away from the people of this state after all that they have gone through.

Furthermore, online prescription renewals are offered across the country and have been in Rhode Island for more than four years, helping consumers and taxpayers save money and time. 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.

H 5612 also severely jeopardizes Rhode Island's growing reputation as a leader when it comes to telemedicine, connected care, and entrepreneurial innovation. Rhode Island's business and political leaders are trying to grow and develop an entrepreneurial ecosystem and banning innovative companies from providing much-needed services to Rhode Islanders is antithetical to that.

In addition to hurting Rhode Island's image as a state where innovation is welcomed, H 5612 will also hurt Rhode Island's bottom line. Health insurance plans that cover state employees would be denied cost savings, and other efficiency benefits to government programs that telemedicine can provide would not materialize.

Rhode Island can't afford for H5612 to proceed any further in the legislative process. 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 access to the lowest possible prices. On behalf of them, we urge you to reject H 5612.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Americans for Vision Care Innovation

