

Georgia opticians get stricter licensing requirements

A new law says those who register for the board exam based on experience only must already be registered as apprentices.

Jena Passut

A law to strengthen the licensing rules for Georgia opticians is being lauded by the state's optometric association.

House Bill 241, which was scheduled to go into effect July 1, requires that those who wish to take the state's board examination based on experience rather than schooling be first registered as an apprentice with the Georgia licensing board.

"Our position has been that education is good," Georgianne B. Bearden, executive vice president and director of the Georgia Optometric Association, told *Primary Care Optometry News* in an interview. "It is good for everybody, particularly for the public."

Thomas Blair Jr., LDO, ABOM, who leads the state's Opticians Association of Georgia, said the "the apprentice/trainee MBE-Minimum Basic Education and registration" bill was in answer to seeing too many opticians who claimed to have experience in the field fail when it came time to take the licensure test. Two schools in Georgia offer formalized optician training: Dekalb Technical College and Ogeechee Technical College.



Opticians celebrate: Members of the Opticians of Association of Georgia pose with Gov. Sonny Perdue (sitting). They are (from left to right) C. R. "Chuck" Sanders Jr. , OAG director; Robert Reynolds, OAG past president; Lynn Cockrell, OAG director; Thomas Blair Jr., OAG president; Cora L. Lester, OAG first vice president; Renee' McKenzie, OAG second vice president and treasurer and George W. Batts Jr., OAG director.

Image: Opticians Association of Georgia

“As a former member of the state licensing board myself, we discovered that the fail rates for people who were opting to apprentice were dismal,” Mr. Blair told PCON. “We felt that we should try to get behind an effort to address this matter so that we could create a higher standard. We sought to raise the bar.”

Mr. Blair said it became obvious that those people who claimed to be in apprenticeship programs actually were just getting on-the-job training that did not prepare them for the exam.

The bill, which was introduced by a former optician, Rep. Jill Chambers, was met with opposition from major retailers, Mr. Blair said.

“The problem was between the definition of apprenticeship and on-the-job training, which these companies were endorsing,” he said. “It wasn’t enough. It would be like telling you to join the Army but train yourself before you go to Iraq. The on-the-job training that was out there was ineffective by evidence of the dismal pass/fail scores. About a 30% pass rate was the established general figure over a 10-year period.”

Opticians who are currently working in Georgia have until Aug. 31 to register for apprenticeship in order to have their previous experience and training count toward the goal.

Ms. Bearden said she hopes the measure will help cut down on the illegal use of some optometrists’ licenses.

“The whole motive was to strengthen the licensing requirements for opticians in the state and to particularly have something that is uniform as far as education is concerned,” she said. “There seems to be a rush, at times, of some establishments who hire people to dispense ophthalmic products, but they’re not licensed. In those instances, what they’ve tried to do is use the optometrist’s license in order for that individual to dispense, which is absolutely against the law. You cannot infringe on an optometrist license by requesting that they allow that license to be used by someone they have absolutely no authority over.”

For more information

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