



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Governor Signs Salas’ Bill to Provide Greater Access to Quality Eye Care
AB 443 expands specialized types of care offered to patients by optometrists

SACRAMENTO – Governor Jerry Brown has signed Assembly Bill (AB) 443, authored by Assemblymember Rudy Salas (D-Bakersfield), which improves crucial eye and health care access by expanding the types of treatment and procedures doctors of optometry can offer to patients.

“I am glad the Governor signed this important legislation,” said Assemblymember Salas. “Improving access to eye care and additional healthcare needs for Californians, especially in rural areas, is a win-win.”

Regulated by the California Board of Optometry (CBO), there are over 7,000 licensed optometrists in the state. Optometrists examine, diagnose, treat, and manage disease, injuries, and disorders of the visual system, as well as identify related systemic conditions affecting the eye. In addition, optometrists prescribe medications, low vision rehabilitation, vision therapy, spectacle lenses, contact lenses, and perform certain surgical procedures.

Despite the state’s efforts, 46 counties have too few primary care doctors to meet the needs of their communities. According to the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's 2017 annual county health rankings, Kern County's ratio of primary care physicians to population is 2,043 to 1 and Kings County is 2,500 to 1, nearly double the statewide benchmark at 1,280 to 1.

AB 443 will alleviate pressure on the health care system and make eye care more accessible by broadening the scope of practice for optometrists. Specifically, the bill allows optometrists to test patients for diabetes; administer flu, shingles and pneumonia vaccines after receiving additional training and certification; broaden treatment options for glaucoma; and expand the types of eye disease doctors of optometry can treat.

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Assemblymember Salas represents part of the City of Bakersfield, the cities of Arvin, Avenal, Corcoran, Delano, Hanford, Lemoore, McFarland, Shafter, Wasco, and the communities of Armona, Buttonwillow, Home Garden, Kettleman City, Lamont, Lost Hills, Stratford and Weedpatch.