

Date of Hearing: May 4, 2022

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Chris Holden, Chair

AB 2236 (Low) – As Amended March 17, 2022

Policy Committee: Business and Professions

Vote: 19 - 0

Urgency: No

State Mandated Local Program: Yes

Reimbursable: No

SUMMARY:

This bill requires the training of an optometric assistant to include performing preliminary subjective refraction procedures, and restores an optometrist's authority to stabilize a patient with acute angle closure glaucoma.

FISCAL EFFECT:

The Board of Optometry (Board) anticipates minimal and absorbable costs.

COMMENTS:

This bill is sponsored by the California Optometric Association. According to the author, this bill provides cleanup language for AB 407 (Salas, Chapter 652, Statutes of 2021), which expanded and revised the scope of practice for qualified optometrists and optometric assistants to diagnose and treat specified disorders and dysfunctions of the visual system and authorized optometric assistants to perform preliminary subjective refraction procedures under specified conditions.

Optometric assistants are unlicensed individuals working under the supervision of an optometrist or an ophthalmologist. AB 407 allowed these assistants to perform preliminary subjective refraction procedures in connection with finalizing subjective refraction procedures performed by an ophthalmologist or optometrist, subject to certain conditions, including a requirement that the assistant have at least 45 hours of documented training in subjective refraction procedures acceptable to the supervising ophthalmologist or optometrist. This bill specifies that this training must include the performance of those procedures.

This bill also restores the authority of an optometrist to stabilize a patient with acute angle closure glaucoma and the requirement that the optometrist immediately refer the patient to an ophthalmologist, which AB 407 erroneously removed. Acute angle-closure glaucoma is an ocular emergency that results from a rapid increase in pressure due to a blockage or obstruction of the outflow of aqueous humor (clear fluid in the space towards the front of the eye). The rapid increase in pressure (glaucoma) can damage the optic nerve and eventually lead to blindness.

AB 2574 (Salas) contains a provision similar to one in this bill and corrects an erroneous cross-reference. AB 2574 is pending in this committee.

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