

A bill that would expand the procedures optometrists in the state of Arkansas can perform on a patient, including some surgery, failed in committee after a close vote. KUAR's Sarah Kellogg has more.

Optometry Bill Fails

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The legislation allows optometrists to use ophthalmic lasers for some surgical procedures, an action that currently is not allowed.

Rep. Jon Eubanks, R-Paris, one of the bill's sponsors and who presented the bill to the committee, said the issue was brought to him by an optometrist, who said they were already getting the training needed for such surgical procedures, but were not allowed to put that training to use. As a rural state, Eubanks believed the legislation would expand coverage for eye care in the state.

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“...for ophthalmologists”

“Having access for our people that in rural areas is important to me. Currently we have optometrists practicing in 80 percent of the counties and if my information is accurate, about 30 percent for ophthalmologists.”

For some legislators, the language of the bill was too vague and could be interpreted to include other surgical procedures. Rep. Stephen Magie, D-Conway, was one of those lawmakers.

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“...somebody will”

“I have a lot of problems with this bill. It's an exclusionary bill. There are too many, 'maybes,' 'what fors,' 'shall bes,' 'what haves' and even if all of that is changed, this still opens this thing up to about 100 and something surgical procedures they can do. And they'll say all day long that they're not going to do them, but somebody will.”

The bill ultimately failed with a vote of 9 to 10. Sarah Kellogg, KUAR news.