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**Media Contact:** Dan Curran  
DanCurran@CurranPR.com  
770-658-9586

**New Law Seeks to Increase Consumer Access to Vision &  
Eye Care Services in Rural Georgia  
*Measure Addresses Shortage of Optometrists in Rural Georgia by  
Adding Them to Eligible List for Cancellable Loans***

**ATLANTA, Ga. (May 14, 2026)** – A new law that seeks to increase consumer access to vision and eye care services in rural Georgia by adding optometrists to the list of providers eligible for cancellable loans has been signed into law by Governor Brian Kemp. The law, designed to address the ongoing shortage of optometrists in rural areas across the state, goes into effect on July 1, 2026.

Access to eye care in rural Georgia is severely limited, with 52 counties—roughly 30% of the state—identified as "vision deserts" with few or no eye care providers, according to research. Rural residents face significant barriers, including long travel distances, high rates of uninsured residents (potentially exceeding 25% in some areas), and a 40% shortage of eye care specialists.

House Bill 659, sponsored by Rep. Gerald Greene (154th District, R-Cuthbert) expands medical education funding and the service cancelable loan program to include doctors of optometry. View the full bill here: <https://www.legis.ga.gov/legislation/70938>

“Doctors of optometry play a vital role in safeguarding both vision and overall health through comprehensive eye care,” said Dr. Lauren Dyak, president-elect of the Georgia Optometric Association. “Adding doctors of optometry to the list of providers eligible for cancellable loans when practicing in rural communities is a critical step toward improving access to care in underserved areas.”

“Since the Georgia Optometric Association’s founding 102 years ago, we have advocated for policies and legislation that assist doctors of optometry and the communities our members serve,” said Bryan Markowitz, executive director of the Georgia Optometric Association. “This new law will have a generational affect not only on our profession but scores of Georgians throughout the state.”

Doctors of optometry can identify early warning signs and manifestations of more than 270 systemic and chronic diseases including diabetes, high blood pressure, autoimmune diseases and cancers during a comprehensive eye exam.

Service-cancelable loans are financial aid programs where the loan balance is forgiven (canceled) in exchange for completing a specific service obligation, such as working in a particular field or serving in the military.

Under the terms of the measure, for each full year of practicing his or her profession in such underserved rural area, the optometrist who obtained the loan shall receive credit for the full amount of one year's loan plus regular interest which accrued on such amount.

For additional information, visit the Georgia Optometric Association online at [www.GOAeyes.com](http://www.GOAeyes.com).

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*The Georgia Optometric Association is a statewide professional organization representing over 700 doctors of optometry located in communities throughout the state of Georgia. Founded in 1904, the GOA and its members work to provide the public with quality vision and eye care services. For more information visit [www.GOAeyes.com](http://www.GOAeyes.com), on Facebook at [Facebook.com/GeorgiaOptometricAssociation](https://www.facebook.com/GeorgiaOptometricAssociation) or follow us on Twitter @GOA\_eyes.*