February 22nd, 2011

The Honorable Steve Beshear
Governor
700 Capitol Avenue
Suite 100
Frankfort, Kentucky 40601

Dear Governor Beshear,

On behalf of the American College of Surgeons (ACS), representing over 78,000 surgeons of which more than 850 are in Kentucky, I am writing to state our opposition to SB 110 and to urge your veto of it. This legislation would significantly expand the scope of practice of optometry into the practice of medicine/surgery, raising considerable patient safety concerns – as well as increase Medicaid expenditures due to increased utilization of services.

The ACS has a strong history of addressing matters relating to patient care and safety, and we are concerned that SB 110 would allow optometrists to practice medicine without the oversight and education requirements imposed on medical doctors. Practicing outside of their scope of practice and without proper supervision by a medical doctor may open up Kentucky citizens to unsafe practice environments and procedures.

SB 110 contains provisions that would allow optometrists to use an array of surgical modalities including but not limited to scalpels, lasers, needles, ionizing radiation, ultrasound, and lasers. In 2007, in an effort to recognize the increased usage of laser surgery, the ACS updated our Statement on surgery using lasers, pulsed light, radiofrequency, devices or other techniques (http://www.258.24.72/fellow_info/statements/st-1.html). According to the statement “surgery is performed for the purpose of structurally altering the human body by the incision or destruction of tissues and is a part of the practice of medicine. Surgery is also the diagnostic or therapeutic treatment of conditions or disease process by any instruments causing localized alteration or transposition of live human tissue which include lasers, ultrasound, ionizing radiation, scalpels, probes, and needles.” The ACS statement also notes that any procedures that can damage the eye (cornea to retina) should only be performed by a licensed physician.

In the interest of patient safety, the American College of Surgeons believes that the types of procedures proposed by SB 110 should only be performed by a licensed Medical Doctor or Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine who meet appropriate education, training and professional standards. Enactment of SB 110 would expand the scope of optometry beyond an optometrists’ training and education to include the practice of medicine and, as defined in the ACS statement, the practice of surgery. As such, the ACS strongly urges you to protect patient safety for Kentucky citizens and veto SB 110.

Sincerely,

David B. Hoyt, MD, FACS
Executive Director

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FEDERATION OF SURGEONS OF THE UNITED STATES AND CANADA, 1913

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