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September 26, 2023

The Honorable Mariannette Miller-Meeks, MD
Chairwoman
House Committee on Veterans' Affairs
Subcommittee on Health
364 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20003

The Honorable Julia Brownley
Ranking Member
House Committee on Veterans' Affairs
Subcommittee on Health
364 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20003

Dear Chairwoman Miller-Meeks and Ranking Member Brownley,

On behalf of the thousands of former sailors, marines, and Coast Guard personnel that we proudly represent, the Fleet Reserve Association (FRA) wants to thank you for holding a hearing, entitled, "*VA's Federal Supremacy Initiative: Putting Veterans First?*" on September 19, 2023. We specifically wish to express concern with the Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA's) approach to establishing national scope of practice standards, particularly with respect to VA-employed optometrists.

The FRA is a congressionally chartered, non-profit organization that represents the interests of the Sea Service community. One of our top priorities is ensuring the safety of the veterans who served our country. **We strongly believe that the VA should not establish national scope of practice standards that would put these men and women and their families at risk.**

We are extremely concerned that the VA seems to be on track toward establishing a national optometry standard that would allow optometrists to perform laser surgeries. Such a standard would put our nation's veterans at substantial risk and be a complete reversal of long-standing policy that only allows ophthalmologists to perform therapeutic laser eye surgery in VA medical facilities. This significant change could result in serious adverse outcomes for patients. Eye surgery is one of the most difficult and delicate surgeries. Optometrists are not trained to provide these types of surgical procedures. Surgery should be reserved for surgeons. ***Eye surgery in particular is best left to trained and experienced ophthalmic surgeons.***

A standard that allows optometrists to furnish surgical services would be out of step with the majority of states, most of which prohibit optometrists from performing surgeries of any type. The VA's optometry national standard of practice should be consistent with what most of the country deems to be safe and most appropriate. Veterans deserve the highest level of care, and therefore optometrists must NOT be allowed to perform laser surgery in VA facilities.

Thank you for overseeing this process and for the opportunity to provide our comments. If you have any questions or require any additional information, please do not hesitate to contact DLP, John R. Davis (john@fra.org).

Sincerely,

John R. Davis
Director, Legislative Programs