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Written testimony of Courtney Joslin
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Rhode Island House Committee on Health and Human Services

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Ocular Telehealth Use in the States

Chairman Casey and members of the House Health and Human Services committee:

My name is Courtney Joslin and I am a Resident Fellow for the R Street Institute, a nonprofit, nonpartisan public policy research organization whose mission is to engage in policy research that supports free markets and limited, effective government. I lead R Street's research on state policies for telehealth, and more broadly, medical disintermediation efforts. Today, I am writing in regard to House Bill 5612, and appreciate the opportunity to elaborate on how other states use ocular telehealth for things like glasses and contact lens prescriptions.

To date, nearly 40 states allow the use of ocular telehealth for contact lens prescriptions and renewals.¹ This widespread adoption is primarily due to two factors: affordability and accessibility. Online prescriptions and renewals make contact lenses easier to access, which is crucial for Americans perhaps now more than ever. Allowing online retailers to compete with brick-and-mortar optometrist offices has benefitted consumers on the basis of price and convenience; allowing consumers to shop for competitive prices on contact lenses and glasses is crucial to affordability, and the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) has strengthened these consumer protections for online access to this effect.²

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused many of the states that currently restrict the use of ocular telehealth to reconsider their policies. The pandemic fundamentally changed the way most Americans could access healthcare. As a result, the use of telehealth grew substantially in 2020 so that access to routine medical care did not come to a halt as statewide lockdown orders took effect. Now, as many social distancing orders come upon expiration, states have recognized that telehealth is here to stay. As such, state legislatures across the country are considering permanent telehealth expansion due to the benefits it provided over the last year, including the use of telehealth for contact lens prescriptions. For example, states like Georgia, Arkansas and Michigan are currently considering legislation to open up access to contact lens prescriptions online. State legislation that would restrict the use of ocular telehealth through disallowing initial prescriptions or even first-time prescription renewals online,



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however, is in opposition to best practices, and should be recognized as such. This would unnecessarily restrict access to telehealth.

Thank you for your time.

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¹ “The Issue,” Americans for Vision Care Innovation, 2021. <https://americansforvisioncareinnovation.org/the-issue>.

² “The Contact Lens Rule: A Guide for Prescribers and Sellers,” Federal Trade Commission, June 2020. <https://www.ftc.gov/tips-advice/business-center/guidance/contact-lens-rule-guide-prescribers-sellers>.