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**POLL: N.C. VOTERS STRONGLY OPPOSE HB 36**

**RALEIGH** – Almost nine out of 10 North Carolina voters oppose legislation that would allow eye-care providers who have not been to medical school to perform eye surgery, a new statewide public opinion poll found.

According to the poll, conducted for the North Carolina Society of Eye Physicians and Surgeons, 86 percent of likely N.C. voters oppose House Bill 36, which would let optometrists perform more than 200 kinds of eye surgery with lasers and scalpels. Among Republican voters statewide, 90 percent oppose HB 36.

When told that optometrists could perform eye surgery after attending only a 32-hour training course, 91 percent of likely voters oppose the proposed legislation, the poll found. Among Republicans, opposition rose to 95 percent.

And 91 percent of likely voters statewide – including 93 percent of Republicans – believe patients deserve the best and safest surgical care possible from qualified medical doctors and surgeons, according to the poll, released today.

“We know where the public stands on House Bill 36 – overwhelmingly opposed everywhere, across all demographics,” said Dee Stewart, a partner in Strategic Partners Solutions, a Raleigh public affairs firm. “Republicans, Democrats, and unaffiliated voters of both genders and all ages strongly oppose this bill.”

Meanwhile, according to the poll, North Carolina voters say health care is the second most important issue facing their community, after the economy and ahead of education, crime, and House Bill 2 (also known as “the bathroom bill”).

“North Carolinians value the *quality* of their health care first and foremost,” said Alan Skipper, Executive Director of the North Carolina Society of Eye Physicians and Surgeons, which represents ophthalmologists. “At a time when so much national attention is focused on difficult health care issues in Washington, D.C., North Carolina’s General Assembly has the opportunity to make an easy decision – one that is in our citizens’ best interest. They should reject House Bill 36.”

Among the poll’s other key findings:

* 90 percent of likely voters say they have access to the eye care they need.
* 93 percent prefer to have an ophthalmologist perform cataract laser surgery.

92 percent prefer ophthalmologists for glaucoma laser surgery, surgery to remove eyelid lesions or tumors, or any other kind of eye surgery.

* 92 percent overall – and 95 percent of Republicans – said the N.C. Medical Board should determine which eye-care providers can perform surgery.
* When told that the N.C. Medical Society opposes HB 36, public opposition to the legislation rises to 89 percent overall, and 91 percent among Republicans.

The poll, conducted by telephone March 7 and 8, randomly surveyed 800 likely voters across North Carolina. It has a margin of error of 3.5 percent.

***Ophthalmologists*** *are licensed medical doctors who graduated from four years of medical school, with at least four more years of clinical and surgical training.*

***Optometrists*** *attend four years of optometry school and are not medical doctors.*

Contacts:

Dee Stewart, 919-828-6455 or dee.stewart@stewartgrouponline.com.

Alan Skipper, NCSEPS, 919-833-3836 or ASkipper@ncmedsoc.org.

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