

OBITUARY



GRAND RIVERS — Sharon Kaye Weaver, 71, of Grand Rivers, passed away on Friday, Jan. 30, 2026, at Baptist Health Paducah. Born April 24, 1954, she was the daughter of the late William Oscar Weaver and Dorothy Mae Hutson Weaver. Mrs. Weaver had been a cook at the Country Kastle Restaurant in Paducah for about seven years and had been a Sunday school teacher for 20 years at the Free Spirit Biker Church on Husbands Road in Paducah. She was preceded in death by her significant other of 25 years, Mark “Lucky” Prather; two sisters, Alfreda Adkinson and Oscarline Weaver; and one great-granddaughter, Jamie Lynn Duncan. She is survived by two daughters, Tammy L. Lady of Grand Rivers, Brenda Benson of Grand Rivers; two sons from a previous marriage, Enoch Robertson and wife Brittany of Paducah, Thomas E Robertson and wife Tesla Marie of Paducah; one cousin and lifelong friend, Gladys Yates of Grand Rivers; and one godchild, Katie Henchey of Paducah. Memorial services will be held at noon Saturday, Feb. 7, at the Freewill Bikers Church off Husbands Road in Paducah. Dunn’s Funeral Home in Eddyville is in charge of the arrangements. P.S. Love you All Whitney, Kortnie, Jessica, Travis, Johnathon, Nathen, Tinsley, Hendrex, Mea, Brook, Carson, Jayctin, Pailsley, Angel, Dalton, William, Roger. See you on the other side.



Dr. Mary Beth Morris reads from a statement at a special meeting of the optometry licensing board Thursday.



Photos by DEBORAH YETTER | Kentucky Lantern
Attending the Thursday meeting of the state optometry board were, from left: Kristin Webb, board counsel; Dr. Karoline Munson; Dr. Murray Adams; Dr. Mary Beth Morris; Christi LeMay, executive director; and Lakin Albrink, a citizen representative.

KY optometry board reinstates national exam rule for next year

Review launched after disputed testing waivers

BY DEBORAH YETTER
KENTUCKY LANTERN

LOUISVILLE — The state board that licenses optometrists reversed itself Thursday and will resume requiring candidates to pass all three parts of a standard national exam instead of substituting an easier Canadian test for one part.

Starting in 2027, optometry graduates seeking a Kentucky license again will be required to pass the exam administered in all 50 states by the National Board of Examiners in Optometry, the Kentucky board decided at a special meeting in Louisville.

The change comes as part of an in-depth review the board is undertaking in the wake of alarms raised by the national examiners and Kentucky attorney general and optometrists. The review will examine policies and past actions that led to a controversy over the waiving of licensure requirements for some optometrists, according to Dr. Mary Beth Morris, a Hancock County optometrist who was elected board president Thursday.

“The Kentucky Board of Optometric Examiners remains committed to protecting the public, maintaining transparency, and ensuring a consistent and accountable licensing process moving forward,” said Morris, reading from a prepared statement.

The Kentucky Lantern was the first to report that the board had granted licenses to 21 optometrists between 2020 and 2023 who had not passed one or more parts of the then-required national exam. The state attorney

general issued an opinion finding that the board had circumvented state law in granting the waivers.

The board Thursday also agreed to limit practices of any optometrists who had received testing waivers by restricting laser eye surgeries they may perform until they meet licensure standards.

“These measures are being implemented out of an abundance of caution, despite the fact that additional education and credentialing are already required to perform such procedures,” Morris’ statement said.

Some of the 21 optometrists identified in a May 25, 2025, letter to the Kentucky board from the national board as having not passed one or more parts of the exam have since met licensure requirements or do not practice in Kentucky, Morris’ statement said.

She declined to answer questions about their identities but said in the statement that the board “continues to investigate each individual situation and will provide clear guidance to all impacted licensees in the weeks ahead.”

The board has given any affected optometrist until 2027 to complete required exams and will accept the Canadian exam.

But her statement said some have been “unfairly targeted” for following previous guidance from the board regarding licensure.

Morris replaces former board president Dr. Joe Ellis, who abruptly stepped down as board president in December amid growing controversy about the board’s

waivers of licensure requirements for some candidates including his daughter, Dr. Hannah Ellis.

Neither Hannah Ellis nor her father, a Benton optometrist and prominent figure in state and national optometry circles, have responded to requests for comment.

Joe Ellis also was the public face of the board’s move last year to adopt the easier Canadian exam, testifying before a legislative committee in April that optometry graduates seeking licensure in Kentucky might be discouraged by the more difficult U.S. exam, which tests a candidate’s scientific and medical knowledge.

Among those calling for a return to the national exam was the Kentucky Optometric Association, which said in a statement last month the decision to allow the Canadian exam “continues to cast doubt” on licensure standards in Kentucky. It also criticized past decisions to waive requirements for some optometrists.

“We are disappointed that licensing decisions by prior members of the Kentucky Board of Optometric Examiners have now called into question the credibility of our profession,” the Jan. 23 statement said.

The Kentucky Optometrists Association, or KOA, also called on the board to address any potential conflicts.

“The KOA board does not condone any acts of favoritism in the licensure process,” its statement said. “Licensure decisions should be based solely on objective, clearly defined criteria and applied uniformly to all applicants

— regardless of personal relationships, professional affiliations or institutional associations.”

The attorney general found that the board violated state law by granting such waivers through internal board decisions rather than enacting a change in state regulations, which would require public notice and comment.

A series of such waivers was granted by the board from 2020 through 2023, initially to address restrictions of the COVID pandemic that limited travel and testing opportunities.

But some waivers were enacted after the state of emergency ended in Kentucky, including one in December 2023 in which board minutes state without elaboration that some candidates unable to pass Part 1 of the national exam “will be allowed licensure with additional educational requirements.”

But the change was controversial, sparking opposition from outside groups including the national board, arguing the Kentucky board was watering down standards for optometrists.

Optometrists hold a four-year doctorate of optometry. Ophthalmologists are medical doctors with advanced training to treat eye diseases and perform surgery.

Among criticisms of allowing an easier test for optometrists was that Kentucky “has one of the broadest scopes of practice for optometrists in the United States,” and thus should meet the highest professional standards, the national board said.

But the state board, in written comments to the legislature in support of the change to allow the Canadian exam, said “a number of optometry students” could not pass the national exam. Joe Ellis, testifying last year before a legislative committee, said the tougher, national exam might discourage young people from entering the profession if the exam “seems insurmountable.”

In an attempt to address questions about optometrists improperly licensed through such waivers, the board on Dec. 31 enacted emergency regulations allowing any optometry graduate from 2020-2023 who has not passed all required licensure exams to do so by 2027. Optometrists who must pass the exams were to be notified by Jan 15.

The board denied an open records request from the Lantern, asking for records of all such notifications, citing “personal privacy” among other considerations.

THERE’S BEEN A MURDER.



CAN YOU SOLVE IT?

FEBRUARY 6-21

GET YOUR TICKETS TODAY!



MARKETHOUSE THEATRE.ORG