

The Vision Council Testifies at USTR Section 301 Hearings, Urges Exclusion of Eyewear and Optical Products

Alexandria, VA – May 6, 2026 – On May 5, [The Vision Council](https://www.thevisioncouncil.org), the national trade association for the optical industry, testified before the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative (USTR) at a public hearing examining Section 301 investigations into structural excess capacity across 16 economies. The hearings are being held May 5–8 at the U.S. International Trade Commission in Washington, DC.

Omar Elkhatib, Director of Government Relations, testified on behalf of the association, urging USTR to exclude eyewear and optical products from any resulting tariff actions.

He outlined five key arguments:

- Tariffs on imported optical inputs, including specialty polymers, acetate sheet, titanium alloys, and optical blanks, raise domestic manufacturing costs rather than protecting U.S. production
- The eyewear sector's demand-driven, high-mix supply chain does not reflect the overcapacity dynamics the investigation is designed to address
- Additional duties would compress margins and jeopardize ongoing domestic investment in innovation
- Cost increases flow through to patients, reducing access to an essential healthcare product
- Eyewear already faces Section 301 duties from prior China actions, making additional layers particularly harmful

Elkhatib also noted that prescription eyewear is classified as a Class I medical device by the FDA, yet does not receive the same tariff exemptions as other low-risk medical products.

More than 70% of Americans rely on prescription eyewear. Even modest out-of-pocket cost increases can lead patients to delay care, allowing conditions like diabetes-related eye disease and glaucoma to go undetected, and result in consequences for public health, educational outcomes, and workforce productivity.

“We appreciated the opportunity to speak on behalf of our members about the real impact of tariffs on businesses and patients,” said **Ashley Mills, CEO of The Vision Council**. “Additional duties would raise manufacturing costs, weaken U.S. competitiveness, and make vision care less affordable for the workers and families who need it most.”

While The Vision Council supports strengthening domestic production, Elkhatib called on USTR to refrain from imposing additional duties on eyewear and optical components, recognize

manufacturers' reliance on globally sourced inputs, assess downstream affordability impacts, and establish a review process for existing Section 301 duties related to medical devices.

“The optical industry's story is distinct from the sectors at the center of this investigation,” said **Omar Elkhatib, Director of Government Relations at The Vision Council**. “Prescription eyewear is a demand-driven, medically necessary product, not a commodity subject to structural overproduction. We believe we presented a compelling case for why our industry and products fall outside the scope of the excess capacity concerns.”

Resources for the Industry

In addition to its advocacy, The Vision Council offers a suite of resources to help members respond to the ongoing impacts of trade and tariff policy.

- **[Latest Tariff Developments](#)**: Ongoing updates on policies and actions affecting the optical industry.
- **[Tariff Dashboard](#)**: A simulator available to members of The Vision Council that models the financial implications of tariffs on imports.
- **[Industry Resources & Guidance](#)**: Country-specific duty explanations, archived webinar recordings, and more.

To learn more and get involved, visit **thevisioncouncil.org**.

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About The Vision Council

The Vision Council brings the power of sight to all through education, government relations, research, and technical standards. A leading advocate for the optical industry, the association positions its members to deliver the eyewear and eyecare people need to look and feel their best. Vital to health, independence and safety, better vision leads to better lives.