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The Vision Council Meets with U.S. Trade Representative Officials to Discuss Tariff Impact on American Eyewear Manufacturers

Alexandria, VA – November 19, 2025 — Last week, leaders from The Vision Council and representatives of U.S. eyewear manufacturers met with senior officials at the Office of the United States Trade Representative (USTR) to discuss how current tariffs on eyewear components and finished goods are affecting American manufacturers, increasing costs for patients, and challenging the overall competitiveness of the U.S. vision industry.

USTR representatives present at the meeting included Marshall Stallings, Director for Intergovernmental Affairs and Public Engagement, and Sarah Short, Director for Industrial Trade Policy. The Vision Council was represented by Ashley Mills, CEO; Omar Elkhatab, Senior Manager of Government Relations; and eyewear manufacturers Ken and Paula Weissman, owners of Modern Optical; and Giulia Valmassoi, CEO of Thema Optical North America.

“Tariffs continue to challenge American optical businesses, suppressing market competitiveness and creating barriers to growth for wholesalers, manufacturers, optical laboratories and retailers,” **said Ashley Mills, CEO of The Vision Council.** “We are committed to working with federal partners to create policies that strengthen domestic manufacturing, reduce costs for patients, and ensure that all Americans have access to high-quality vision care.”

Industry Leaders Highlight Tariff Impacts

The group outlined how tariffs on raw materials, parts, and finished eyewear products constrain domestic growth, limiting hiring, expansion, and R&D, while driving up consumer prices and putting pressure on small, family-owned manufacturers across the country.

The Vision Council emphasized the strong potential of U.S. eyewear manufacturing to drive job creation, expand export capacity, and support sustainable economic growth, especially as the industry increasingly incorporates AI to enhance production and innovation. They also advocated for a strengthened “Made in USA” labeling policy designed to reward companies that invest, hire, manufacture, and distribute domestically.

Key Issues Discussed

- **Higher patient costs:** Out-of-pocket eyewear expenses have risen by roughly **10%** this year, pushing consumers toward low-cost foreign online vendors and reducing demand for U.S.-made products.
- **Health implications:** More than 61% of Americans rely on prescription eyewear. Untreated vision problems are linked to diabetes, hypertension, depression, and increased fall risk; up to half of childhood vision issues are preventable with corrective eyewear.
- **Impact on vulnerable populations:** Seniors, children, and Medicaid beneficiaries are most affected as rising costs strain providers and manufacturers serving state programs.
- **Need for regulatory parity:** Inconsistent tariff treatment across low-risk Class I medical devices has created uncertainty and cost burdens for eyewear manufacturers.
- **Strengthening U.S. manufacturing:** The Vision Council highlighted companies investing in domestic production and discussed how tariff relief could accelerate onshoring and supply-chain resilience.

Additionally, The Vision Council requested USTR guidance on federal tools that could support U.S. eyewear manufacturing and workforce growth.

"I truly appreciated how open and receptive the USTR representatives were during our discussion," **said Giulia Valmassoi, CEO of Thema Optical North America.** "I'm grateful to The Vision Council for organizing this important dialogue and for ensuring that the voices of American manufacturers are heard."

Tariff-Related Resources for Members

To support companies navigating tariff challenges, The Vision Council provides:

- Regulatory and tariff guidance
- Federal policy and advocacy support
- Timely member alerts and issue briefings
- Research and economic impact data
- Direct assistance for members assessing tariff implications

The Vision Council continues to advocate on behalf of its member companies and promote policies that support access to vision care and a strong domestic optical industry.

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