



**TESTIMONY BEFORE THE HOUSE WAYS & MEANS COMMITTEE
HOUSE BILL 1375
Public School Students – Vision Services and the Vision for Maryland Program**

*Karen Siska Creel, Director, Division of School Health Services, Anne Arundel County Department of Health
For the Maryland Association of County Health Officers (MACHO)
Position: Oppose – March 6, 2020*

The Maryland Association of County Health Officers (MACHO) **opposes HB 1375 due to the following specific concerns. HB 1375 would:**

- Require expanding vision screening services to all students with an Individualized Education Program (IEP) or a 504 Plan, students with medical programs reported by parents, students with behavioral problems, and students with lower academic performance. The bill also adds an additional vision screening examination for all elementary students to existing requirements. *These unfunded mandates increase program costs and burdens on local health departments (LHDs) and school boards (BOEs).*
- Require LHDs or BOEs to provide diagnostic vision evaluations for students who fail their screen and whose parents or guardians do not arrange follow up evaluation. In addition, it requires LHDs or BOEs to provide corrective glasses for students free of charge or to bill for those who have insurance. *Administrative burden of insurance contracting and billing is substantial and LHDs or BOEs would be required to absorb any balance that is not covered by insurance carriers, with no additional funding.*
- In order to assure the requirements of diagnostic vision care and the supply of corrective glasses are carried out, an optometry office would need to be set up in each school or mobile vision clinic vehicles would need to be purchased, equipped, and staffed to provide these services. Otherwise, LHDs and BOEs would be required to arrange and pay for transportation to private optometry offices during school hours. The bill leaves it up to BOEs and LHDs to determine which entity is financially liable for transportation costs since it provides no guidance as to which entity is ultimately responsible. *Again, no funding is allocated for either the establishment of the optometry offices or transportation.*
- Dictate that BOEs may coordinate with the proposed statewide Vision for Maryland Program and/or other governmental, private or non-profit agencies to obtain funding. *However, the bill provides no guaranteed level of funding from any of these sources.*

MACHO acknowledges that providing expanded comprehensive vision services for all students regardless of their ability for their families to pay is a laudable goal and very important for learning in the 21st century. However, without the requisite amount of funding that is not dependent upon availability of external grants, it is unrealistic to require that LHDs and BOEs carry out the bill's requirements. For these reasons, MACHO opposes HB 1375. **For more information, please contact Ruth Maiorana, MACHO Executive Director at rmaiora1@jhu.edu or 410-614-6891.** This communication reflects the position of MACHO.