



# Maryland Education Coalition

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BILL: **HB 1375**

TITLE: **Vision Services and the Vision for Maryland Program**

Date: March 6, 2020

POSITION: SUPPORT

COMMITTEE: House Ways & Means

The Maryland Education Coalition (MEC) is a group of organizations and individuals dedicated for over thirty-years to improving outcomes for all students in Maryland public schools by promoting equal access to high-quality programs and services, adequate and equitable funding for public education, and vigorous systemic accountability. Among our member organizations include three of the most active civil rights groups in Maryland (ACLU, NAACP, CASA), several organizations that advocate for special population students and programs and Maryland PTA, the oldest and largest public education advocacy in the state.

MEC has worked for decades to promote successful education outcomes for all public-school students, **regardless of jurisdiction, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, gender identity, English language learner status, or disability.** We believe Maryland in order to realize its constitutional guarantee that all children in the state have access to *"a thorough and efficient system of public education"* must provide well-rounded education programs. We believe that our students' vision is an integral part of their public education as they need to see to learn.

However, too many of our students are needlessly struggling due to undiagnosed, untreated vision disorders. Schools are using limited, outdated screenings to rule out vision when the Prevent Blindness Position Statement on School-Aged Vision Screening and Eye Health Programs states **child's failing to reach age-appropriate developmental or academic milestones should bypass vision screening and, instead, be referred directly to an optometrist or ophthalmologist for a comprehensive eye examination because these children have a higher rate of vision problems.** This change in MSDE policy will ensure the vision of our struggling students are being comprehensively examined by an eye care provider.

In addition, students who are underinsured, uninsured, working poor, and/or transportation are not getting the eye exams/glasses they need to succeed. This 2020 legislation Vision for Maryland Program will close the gap in student access to vision care/glasses. Baltimore City has been addressing the gap through Vision for Baltimore, a successfully partnership to provide eye exams and glasses to students in need. Doctor Leana Wen, former Health Commissioner at the Baltimore City Department of Health states, "25 percent of our schoolchildren needed glasses, but were not getting them. That's estimated to be 15,000 to 20,000 of our kids who'll end up having to look at the blackboard, and it's blurry, and they don't know why, and think that it's normal." But this gap is not just in Baltimore City, students across Maryland are struggling due to simply not having access to glasses. Passing HB 1375 will close the gap and ensure that in every district not another educational year goes by where these children struggle to see.

As this legislation engages in larger conversations about the quality of education in Maryland and movement towards the goal of providing a world class education for *all* students, The Vision for Maryland Program will provide the tools necessary for schools to ensure our Maryland students have the vision they need to succeed. For these reasons,

MEC supports House Bill 1375 and urges a favorable report.

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[MEC Members](#) - Advocates for Children and Youth, American Civil Liberties Union of MD, Arts Education in Maryland Schools, CASA, Decoding Dyslexia Maryland, Disability Rights Maryland, League of Women Voters of MD, Let Them See Clearly, Maryland Coalition for Community Schools, Maryland Out of School Time Network, Maryland PTA, Maryland NAACP, Parents Advocacy Consortium, Rick Tyler, Jr., Right to Read MD, School Social Workers of MD, Sharon Rubinstein