



TESTIMONY TO THE WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEE

HB0893: Primary and Secondary Students- Vision and Hearing Studies and Evaluations

POSITION: Support

BY: Linda Kohn, President

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The League of Women Voters Maryland supports **House Bill 893: Primary and Secondary Students- Vision and Hearing Studies and Evaluations**. The League believes that **early intervention measures are essential to help children reach their full potential**. It supports policies and programs at all levels in the community and government that promote the well-being and encourage the full development of children.

Per the Journal of School Health, **“More than 20% of school-aged youth have some kind of vision problem....Causal pathways through which vision problems adversely affect academic achievement include sensory perceptions, cognition, and school connectedness.”**¹ Similarly, **close to 15% of U.S. children ages 6-19 experience hearing loss,**² which also can have significant academic, social, and behavioral consequences that limit school success.

Offering readily-available, high-quality health programs during school hours and on school grounds helps to eliminate health disparities, as school-based services are easily accessed, and utilized without stigma. **But offering only vision and hearing screening is not always sufficient to solve vision and hearing problems. Many children who fail vision and hearing screenings do not ultimately receive treatment.**

House Bill 893 would establish a workgroup to study and make recommendations on how to improve vision and hearing support services for students. Educational and medical professionals would work together to study the prevalence of vision and hearing problems, and identify the barriers that have been preventing children from receiving the services they require.

Too many Maryland students fail to receive the help they need to succeed in school -- and beyond -- even if it's a need as fundamental as a pair of glasses or a hearing aid. This is a matter of equity. It is important that schoolchildren in our state receive essential vision and hearing services, and for that reason, **the League of Women Voters Maryland, representing 1,500+ concerned members throughout Maryland, urges a favorable report on House Bill 893.**

¹ <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/21923871/>

² <https://www.jcfs.org/blog/hearing-loss-common-school-aged-children#:~:text=Hearing%20loss%20can%20affect%20a,inside%20and%20outside%20the%20classroom.>