

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2017 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
Third Reader - Revised

Senate Bill 604

(Senator Bates, *et al.*)Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs
and FinanceWays and Means and Health and
Government Operations

**Visual Impairments - Requirements for School Personnel Training, Student
Screening, and Maryland Medical Assistance Program Coverage**

This bill requires each local board of education, by July 1, 2018, to require school personnel who conduct vision screenings to complete a specified training course regarding understanding and recognizing symptoms of visual impairments, including visual and binocular processing disorders. A vision screening conducted by a local board of education or local health department (LHD) must include administration of a specified computerized screening to detect possible symptoms of visual impairments. The Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DHMH) must provide each LHD with the equipment for the screenings.

The bill takes effect July 1, 2017.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: DHMH general fund expenditures increase by \$1.1 million in FY 2018 to provide equipment to LHDs and conduct training; future year costs for ongoing maintenance and replacement of equipment have not been quantified. Revenues are not affected.

(in dollars)	FY 2018	FY 2019	FY 2020	FY 2021	FY 2022
Revenues	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
GF Expenditure	1,059,800	-	-	-	-
Net Effect	(\$1,059,800)	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0

Note:() = decrease; GF = general funds; FF = federal funds; SF = special funds; - = indeterminate increase; (-) = indeterminate decrease

Local Effect: Significant operational impact on local boards of education and LHDs to perform expanded vision screenings. Potential increase in local expenditures for training

costs for school personnel who perform vision screenings. **This bill may impose a mandate on a unit of local government.**

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Bill Summary:

Training of School Personnel Who Conduct Vision Screenings

Each local board of education must approve a course that (1) is designed for educators; (2) has been in use for at least five years; and (3) is taken online and complies with § 508 of the federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973. New school personnel required to complete the training must complete the training within two years after the date of hire.

Computerized Screenings for Possible Symptoms of Visual Impairments

A computerized screening for visual impairments must include, at a minimum, (1) interpupillary distance; (2) fixation duration; (3) static visual acuity, monocular and binocular; (4) Von Graefe vertical vergence; (5) Von Graefe horizontal vergence; (6) accommodation AC/A; (7) convergence; (8) divergence; (9) supravergence; (10) infravergence; (11) eye dominance; (12) color deficiency, monocular and binocular; (13) gratings contrast sensitivity, monocular and binocular; and (14) field of view and range recognition, 30 degree.

As is required for vision screenings under current law, unless the student has been tested within the past year, a computerized screening must be given in the year that a student enters a school system, enters the first grade, and enters the eighth or ninth grade.

As with the results of current vision screenings, the results of the computerized screening for visual impairments must be made part of the permanent record file of each student, given to the parents of any student who fails the screening, and reported to the local board of education or the LHD. Additionally, the results must be provided to parents if a student may have possible symptoms of a visual impairment.

A parent or guardian must report to the local board of education or LHD on the recommended services received by a student who has failed the screenings or who may have possible symptoms of a visual impairment. As with the results of current vision screenings, a student whose parent or guardian objects in writing to a computerized screening for visual impairments on religious grounds may not be required to take the

screening. The local board of education or the LHD must report the results of the computerized screenings for visual impairments to DHMH and the number of students receiving the recommended services, if practicable.

Current Law: Each local board of education or LHD must provide hearing and vision screenings for all students in local public schools, and each LHD must provide and fund the screenings for private and nonpublic schools in the jurisdiction. Unless evidence is presented that a student has been tested within the past year, the screenings must take place in the years that a child enters a school system, enters the first grade, and enters the eighth or ninth grade. Further screenings must be done in accordance with the bylaws adopted by the State Board of Education or policies adopted by a local board of education or LHD.

Results of screenings go in each child's permanent record, are given to the parents of any student who fails the screenings, and are reported to the local board of education or LHD. The parent or guardian of a student who does not pass a screening must report on the recommended services received by the student, and the report must be submitted on a form provided by the local board of education or LHD. The local board of education or LHD must report the results of screenings and the number of students receiving recommended services to DHMH. A student whose parent or guardian objects in writing to a hearing or vision screening on religious grounds may not be required to take the screening.

Code of Maryland Regulations 13A.05.01.03 defines "visual impairment" as impairment in vision which, even with correction, adversely affects a student's educational performance. "Visual impairment" includes partial sight and blindness. "Student with a disability" includes a student age 3 through the end of the school year in which the student turns 21 who has been evaluated as having visual impairment, including blindness, and who, because of the impairment, needs special education and related services. According to the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE), as of December 2016, 106,847 students in Maryland had IEPs. Based on MSDE's *Maryland Report Card*, in 2016, there were 294,272 students receiving special education services.

Background: Vision screenings are provided by either the local school board or LHD, depending on the jurisdiction. In one jurisdiction, the local school system contracts with a local hospital to perform the screenings. Vision screenings are predominately an eyesight test to determine if the child has visual acuity of 20/40 or greater. These routine screenings do not test all visual skills.

Visual processing disorders can hinder an individual's ability to make sense of information taken in through the eyes. Difficulties with visual processing affect how visual information is interpreted by the brain. Visual processing disorders may result in difficulty with spatial relations, visual discrimination, visual closure, object recognition, relationships between objects, and visual motor integration. Binocular processing disorders are visual impairments in which binocular visual skills, such as tracking, depth perception, and

convergence (the ability of the eyes to move and work as a team) are not adequately developed. These disorders are not identified through routine vision screenings and may be inadvertently misdiagnosed as other conditions such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder or autism, leading to inappropriate interventions.

State Expenditures: DHMH general fund expenditures increase by \$1,059,820 in fiscal 2018 only, which reflects the bill's July 1, 2017 effective date. This estimate reflects the cost of purchasing equipment for computerized screenings and hiring one full-time contractual staff specialist to conduct training on how to use the vision screening equipment at each LHD. It includes a salary, fringe benefits, and one-time start-up costs. The information and assumptions used in calculating the estimate are stated below:

- The bill requires DHMH to fund and provide to *each LHD* the equipment for the computerized screenings, even though not all vision screenings are provided by LHDs.
- A minimum of 125 machines (an average of 5 machines for each of the 24 LHDs, plus 5 backup machines) are required at an estimated unit cost of \$8,000.

Contractual Position	1
Salary and Fringe Benefits	\$54,555
Computerized Equipment for Screenings	1,000,000
One-time Start-up Operating Expenses	<u>5,265</u>
Total FY 2018 State Expenditures	\$1,059,820

This estimate does not include any health insurance costs that could be incurred for specified contractual employees under the State's implementation of the federal Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act.

The estimate also does not reflect the cost of maintenance or replacement of the machines, which will increase DHMH general fund expenditures in future years.

Local Fiscal Effect: Expansion of vision screening requirements will have a significant operational impact on both LHDs and local school systems. In addition, each local board of education must require school personnel who conduct vision screenings to complete specified training. To the extent local school systems must pay for or reimburse school personnel for such training, they likely incur additional costs.

Additional Comments: To the extent computerized screening identifies students with visual impairments and results in appropriate diagnosis and treatment, savings may occur in other areas, such as special education costs and unnecessary medical or behavioral health treatments.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: None.

Cross File: HB 458 (Delegate Kittleman, *et al.*) - Ways and Means and Health and Government Operations.

Information Source(s): Maryland Association of County Health Officers; Maryland State Department of Education; Department of Health and Mental Hygiene; Department of Legislative Services

Fiscal Note History: First Reader - February 13, 2017
md/ljm Third Reader - March 18, 2017
Revised - Amendment(s) - March 18, 2017
Revised - Updated Information - March 18, 2017

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