



MONTGOMERY COUNTY BOARD OF EDUCATION

Expanding Opportunity and Unleashing Potential

850 Hungerford Drive ♦ Room 123 ♦ Rockville, Maryland 20850

BILL: HB0015
TITLE: Public Schools - Student Health - Certificate of Dental Health
DATE: 1/28/2020
POSITION: OPPOSE
COMMITTEE: Ways and Means
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The Montgomery County Board of Education (Board) **opposes** HB0015.

House Bill 15 Certificate of Dental Health Requirements would require that students would have to submit a certificate of dental health, on a schedule to be determined by the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) and the Maryland Department of Health (MDH), beginning in the 2022–2023 school year. This bill would set forth requirements for dental health that are comparable to what currently is required for students in terms of physical and medical health.

Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) understands the importance of oral health and how poor oral health significantly increases the likelihood of student absenteeism and lower school performance (disproportionately affecting low income families). Poor oral health can affect quality of life, self-esteem, psychosocial development, and nutrition and physical growth. Tooth abscesses from untreated poor oral health also can lead to more significant and potentially life threatening infections.

This bill places the responsibility of obtaining and paying for a dental examination and a certificate of dental health on families. The National Association of Dental Plans estimates that about 75% of Americans had dental benefits by the end of 2016 with the majority receiving such benefits through their employers. Health insurance purchased through Maryland Health Connection includes dental benefits for minors. Uninsured children may receive dental benefits through Care for Kids. Requiring a certificate of dental health to enroll in public school could place an undue financial burden on a large number of Montgomery County families and their children. Even families with dental benefits may be faced with large co-payments.

This bill, while intending to support children and increase availability for learning, would unduly penalize mid- to low-income families. Mid- to low-income families are more likely to work for employers who do not offer dental benefits. Even families with dental benefits may be faced with high deductibles and/or co-payments, especially on more expensive dental procedures. Penalizing students that cannot meet this requirement, without offering state and local assurances of access to free or reasonable dental care, does not help children learn and achieve.

This bill refers to guidelines that will be developed by MSDE and MDH at some later date and that are critical for determining the effect that the bill will have on day-to-day operations. Will

children not be allowed to attend school unless they have good oral health? Will children be allowed to attend school with up to four cavities? What follow-up will be required of school staff members?

For these reasons, the Board **opposes** this legislation and urges an unfavorable report.