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February 21, 2022

The Honorable Vanessa E. Atterbeary, Chairman  
House Ways & Means Committee  
131 House Office Building  
6 Bladen Street  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

**Re: Testimony in Support of House Bill 657 “Public Schools – Standardized Behavioral Health Screenings for Students – Development and Implementation”**

Dear Chairman & Members of the Committee:

The Maryland Optometric Association (MOA) submits this testimony in strong support of House Bill 657 entitled, “Public Schools – Standardized Behavioral Health Screenings for Students – Development and Implementation” (HB 657). Passage of HB 657 will help identify underserved students to ensure receipt of needed behavioral health services to reach their full academic potential.

MOA is a 501 (c) 6 non-profit trade association representing hundreds of member optometrists practicing in almost every jurisdiction in the State. Many of our doctors specialize in the diagnosis and treatment of children with learning-related and developmental visual deficiencies. These visual deficiencies impact a child’s ability to learn in an academic setting and can often present as a behavioral or developmental issue.

There are many visual conditions that can impact a child’s ability to read, write, spell or perform math computations. Approximately 80% of learning comes through the visual system. When assessing a child’s overall behavioral health for learning difficulties, it is critical that all important factors (physical and emotional) be considered. This legislation would bring together a well-rounded stakeholder group of healthcare professionals and child advocates to streamline and improve both the identification and assessment process for children with potential behavioral health issues. In turn, parents and educators will have better tools to identify students in need of services and connect them with the right provider(s).

For the reasons stated herein, the Maryland Optometric Association urges this Committee to vote favorably on House Bill 657.

Sincerely,



Whitney Fahrman, O.D.  
MOA President