



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

Wes Moore, Governor · Aruna Miller, Lt. Governor · Laura Herrera Scott, M.D., M.P.H., Secretary

March 1, 2023

The Honorable Vanessa E. Atterbeary
Chair, House Ways and Means Committee
Room 131, House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

RE: HB 1054 – School Health and Vision Services – Screenings and Eye Examinations – Letter of Concern

Dear Chair Atterbeary and Committee Members:

The Maryland Department of Health (MDH) is submitting this letter of concern for House Bill (HB) 1054 - School Health and Vision Services - Screenings and Eye Examinations. HB 1054 requires the School-Based Health Center (SBHC) Program to implement and oversee the Vision for Maryland Program that will expand the “Vision to Learn” vision support services to all counties in the State. HB 1054 further requires MDH and the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) to develop a Pediatric Vision Program including a “central repository” to allow exchange of health information between optometrists and ophthalmologists, and school health staff. The bill mandates an eye examination for children prior to school enrollment and vision screening for students in 3rd or 4th grade, and authorizes county boards of education to determine whether certain students should receive an eye examination or glasses.

HB 1054 will create a new requirement for children to provide documentation of an eye examination prior to school enrollment. However, there is no evidence to support this requirement. As such, the bill will place an undue burden on families and the health care system and may prevent children from school enrollment. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that pediatric health care providers conduct visual acuity screening at ages 4 and 5 years as well as in cooperative 3 year olds.¹ Children will be referred for a comprehensive eye examination by their pediatric health care provider if they fail screening or there are other concerns.

Furthermore, HB 1054 will require county boards of education to decide whether students who fail a vision screening or have signs or symptoms of concern should receive (1) an eye examination, and (2) if recommended by an examining ophthalmologist or optometrist, receive eyeglasses. Currently, if a student fails a school vision screening or has signs or symptoms of concern, the SHS guidelines state that the student should be referred for a comprehensive eye examination by an ophthalmologist or optometrist. These comprehensive eye examinations, completed by licensed medical professionals, are important to ensure the child receives the

¹ Bright Futures and American Academy of Pediatrics. (2022). *Recommendations for Preventive Pediatric Health Care*. https://downloads.aap.org/AAP/PDF/periodicity_schedule.pdf?_ga=2.152119417.1783973960.1676044506-730577136.1663587180

appropriate eye care to meet their needs. County boards of education include a variety of members who may not be knowledgeable on eye health and care and should not be involved in this decision-making. In addition, county boards of education should not decide on if glasses are necessary, as this health care decision should be made by the student's parent/guardian.

If you would like to discuss this further, please do not hesitate to contact Megan Peters, Acting Director of Governmental Affairs at megan.peters@maryland.gov or (410) 260-3190.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Laura Herrera Scott".

Laura Herrera Scott M.D., M.P.H
Secretary