



**2023 SESSION
POSITION PAPER**

BILL: SB 573 - School Health and Vision Services – Screenings and Eye Examinations
COMMITTEE: Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
POSITION: Letter of Concern
BILL ANALYSIS: SB 573 would alter the duties of the State Department of Education’s and the Maryland Department of Health’s primary contact employees for school-based health centers to include implementation and oversight of the Vision for Maryland Program; alter the requirements for vision screenings for students; require a county board of education to determine whether certain students should receive an eye examination and eyeglasses; and establish the Pediatric Vision Program and the Vision for Maryland Program to expand vision support services; among other aspects.

POSITION RATIONALE: The Maryland Association of County Health Officer’s (MACHO) concern with SB 573 is primarily related to unfunded mandates. Health Officers agree with the effort to improve vision services to students, but without an accompanying financial commitment, the additional requirements in SB 573 would force local health departments (LHDs) to strip funding from other critical programs such as maternal-child and disease surveillance services.

The two areas of greatest concern for LHDs are:

- The requirement to expand vision screening services to all third of fourth graders. This *increases the provision of services by LHDs by 50% without any funding mechanism*. Funding will be needed to pay for a significant increase in staffing and for additional medical equipment. In addition to the lack of financial backing, staffing would need to be dramatically and simultaneously increased across the state in a sector with an insufficient workforce.
- The requirement for LHDs to track completion of diagnostic eye exams performed by private optometrists and ophthalmologists (page 5, lines 28-31). *There are no practical means available to LHDs to satisfy this condition*.

MACHO acknowledges that expanded student vision services is a laudable goal. However, without reliable, sustainable funding, LHDs cannot realistically carry out the bill’s mandates. Health Officers suggest that the Blueprint For Maryland’s Future contain a comprehensive student health plan. This plan should **prioritize and fund** initiatives such as improved vision and hearing services, behavioral health services, student nutrition and exercise, asthma control, etc. By taking a more holistic and coordinated approach, student health needs can be more effectively matched with the funding necessary to produce meaningful gains. These improvements will result in students more capable of achieving inside and outside of the classroom.

For these reasons MACHO expresses concerns with SB 573. For more information, please contact Ruth Maiorana, Executive Director, MACHO, at rmaiora1@jhu.edu or 410-937-1433.