



TESTIMONY TO THE EDUCATION, ENERGY AND THE ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

SB0573: School Health and Vision Services- Screenings and Eye Examinations

POSITION: Support

BY: Nancy Soreng, President

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The League of Women Voters supports **Senate Bill 573: School Health and Vision Services-Screenings and Eye Examinations**. The League believes that early intervention measures are essential to help children reach their full potential. It supports policies and programs at all levels of the community and government that promote the well-being and encourage the full development of all children.

Per the Journal of School Health¹:

-More than 20% of school-aged youth have some kind of vision problem.... When diagnosed with eye care problems, Black youth living in poverty received fewer and less intensive services. Causal pathways through which vision problems adversely affect academic achievement include sensory perceptions, cognition, and school connectedness. Vision screening is widespread in the nation's schools, but **the educational (and public health) benefits from these efforts are jeopardized by lack of follow-up and coordination of efforts.**

Students with neurodevelopmental disorders such as Down Syndrome, a family history of eye diseases, or those with medical issues such as diabetes or a history of premature birth are particularly at risk for vision problems.

Maryland law mandates periodic vision screening tests for all students in public schools upon entry to school, in first grade, and in eighth or ninth grade. If a child fails a screening test, the parents are notified and advised to arrange for a comprehensive eye exam with a pediatric optometrist or ophthalmologist who participates in the Pediatric Vision program. Only a comprehensive eye exam with a licensed provider can diagnose a child's visual problem and determine whether glasses or another corrective device is needed.

Senate Bill 573 will mandate an additional vision screening, for students in third or fourth grade. The Vision for Maryland Program will help ensure that all children who need vision support services receive them. A central repository of information on students' vision needs will help coordinate communication and interventions on behalf of the student between the school, parents, and pediatric optometrists and ophthalmologists.

¹ <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/21923871/>

The current school vision screening system does not benefit all of the Maryland school children who need vision services. **Too many students fail to receive the help they need in order to succeed in school- even if it's a need as fundamental, and as simple, as a pair of glasses.** Although the Affordable Care Act considers pediatric vision care an essential health benefit, and thus comprehensive pediatric eye exams are covered, full coverage for glasses is not always included as a benefit.

This is a matter of equity. It is important that all children in our state receive the vision services they need to succeed, and for that reason, the League and its 1,500+ members urge the committee to give a favorable report to Senate Bill 573.