



THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

February 23, 2023

Chair Senator Brian Feldman
Education, Energy, and the Environment
2 West Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

Chairman Feldman, Vice-chair Kagan and Education and Energy, and Environment Committee Members,

THE PROBLEM - Many Maryland primary and secondary school children with vision problems never receive the glasses necessary for them to see well enough to learn. This ability is a necessity in order to honor our commitment to the Blueprint for Maryland's Future.

SB573, the work product of a multi-stakeholder groups including ophthalmologists, optometrists representatives of the state school boards, state superintendents, state local public health officers, vision advocates, community service organizations, and other stakeholders who would:

- Establish a process to provide vision exams and prescribed glasses for students who have fallen through the cracks and connect them with local providers and resources for ongoing and long-term follow-up and management;
- Add additional vision screenings for students in public schools;
- Standardize based on local jurisdiction best practices the information shared with families regarding vision screenings, vision exams, and resources available for obtaining indicated exams and glasses;
- Convene a work group of the Maryland Department of Education and the Maryland Department of Health to collaborate in identifying and partnering throughout the state with local resources and to expand the current programs that are successfully filling the gaps in vision care so that every jurisdiction will have what they need to ensure that no child needing glasses can receive them.

Establishing a work group to determine the best plan to roll out the program so that jurisdictions with the greatest need are prioritized earlier and coordinate with local school systems, public health departments, providers, and community resources in customizing the program to local needs is a core component of this legislation.

Additionally, it has been recommended that we create a task force to study children's vision health, similar to the Task Force on Oral Health that was formed as result of legislation passed during the 2021 Regular Session.

Between thirty and seventy percent of students who fail vision screenings fail to either get the vision exams to diagnose the problem or the glasses that they need. This is not isolated to a particular socioeconomic level. The reasons vary, and are not always related to family income, but the result is the same. By ensuring that the students identified as needing glasses actually get them, we make a small upstream investment that can lead to huge downstream benefits for the student, the community and our state, at a much lower cost than waiting until than the costs associated with education failures.

I respectfully request a favorable report.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Karen Lewis Young". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Senator Karen Lewis Young