



PSSAM
Public School Superintendents' Association
OF MARYLAND

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BILL: HB 1054
TITLE: School Health and Vision Services – Screenings and Eye Examinations
DATE: March 1, 2023
POSITION: Oppose
COMMITTEE: Ways and Means
CONTACT: Mary Pat Fannon, Executive Director, PSSAM

The Public School Superintendents' Association of Maryland (PSSAM), on behalf of all twenty-four public school superintendents, **opposes** House Bill 1054.

House Bill 1054 requires local boards of education or local health departments to provide vision screenings to specified students and to ensure students who fail a vision screening receive an eye examination and, if recommended, eyeglasses. The bill further requires that, before a student may enroll in public school, the student must return a completed eye examination form to the local board or LHD. Further, the bill establishes a Pediatric Vision Program, to facilitate communication between pediatric optometrists and ophthalmologists and school health professionals, and the Vision for Maryland Program, to expand the services provided by Vision to Learn (VTL) to every county in the State.

PSSAM's primary concern with House Bill 1054 is the significantly expanded scope of mandated school-based vision screenings, as well as prescriptive procedures and vision services. Any mandated expansion of the annual vision screenings impacts both local school systems and county health departments, both of which are required to provide vision screenings to students as specified in existing law.

PSSAM supports maintaining the current law, under §7-404 of the Education Article, which directs existing protocols for hearing and vision screenings. Under current law, vision screenings are mandated upon entering school, in grade one, and grades eight or nine. If, as proposed in this bill, the mandated annual vision screenings are expanded to include either third or fourth grade, the costs for doing so would be imposed on local school systems or local health departments, creating an unfunded mandate.

Maryland's superintendents champion a statewide approach to vision screening that ensures the timely assessment of each student's hearing and vision health condition. PSSAM appreciates the bill's proposal to mandate state funding for the new and expanded "Vision for Maryland" programs. However, there is no state funding identified for the costs of administering expanded vision screenings that will fall under the responsibility of school systems and local governments. In addition to the expanded number of mandated vision screenings, the bill further requires school systems to "ensure" that a student receives the recommended eyeglasses. As laudable as this goal is, it must be supported by state resources to ensure equity for each student and family.

For these reasons, PSSAM **opposes** House Bill 1054 and urges an unfavorable report.