



TO: The Honorable Vanessa E. Atterbeary, Chair
Members, House Ways and Means Committee
The Honorable Terri L. Hill
The Honorable Deni Taveras

FROM: Danna L. Kauffman
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DATE: March 1, 2023

RE: **SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENT** – House Bill 1054 – *School Health and Vision Services – Screenings and Eye Examinations*

The Maryland Society of Eye Physicians and Surgeons (MSEPS) is the professional organization of medical doctors who practice ophthalmology in the State of Maryland. Maryland is a world-renowned center for the training of ophthalmologists including the Wilmer Eye Institute at Johns Hopkins University. MSEPS **support with amendment** House Bill 1054 with the amendments offered by the sponsors. However, in our support, we do believe that there are policy issues that should be carefully considered as the General Assembly balances needs against the availability of resources.

MSEPS supports the expansion of vision screening to an additional grade above and beyond the current state mandate of first entry to school, first grade and eighth or ninth grade. Conducting vision screenings in an interim year of 3rd or 4th grade is important to close the seven-year gap between vision screenings in the present law (page 3). MSEPS also supports the utilization of a student health form that includes a place to describe any health issue, including vision issues, that may adversely affect academic performance (page 3) as a method for identifying issues early and assisting in taking appropriate steps.

One area that we believe needs to be amended is on page 6 of the bill in subsection (g). This subsection refers to “eye exams.” It is unclear if this “eye exam” is for those who fail the screening and/or have a neurodevelopmental delay or if it is intended to be across all students. MSEPS does not support comprehensive eye exams for all children before school entry. Rather, efforts should be focused on those children who have failed the vision screening and on increasing the frequency of vision screenings throughout childhood. The bill needs to clarify the reference to “eye exam” in this subsection. If the intent is to require comprehensive eye exams for all students, then MSEPS would not support and would request removal of this provision.

However, we do want to point out the inconsistency contained on page 5 of the bill and page 7 of

the bill regarding the Pediatric Vision Program. First, it is unclear why this needs to be designated as a “program,” given that it is only creating a central repository to allow optometrists and ophthalmologists to report results of eye exams after a failed screening. On that note, on page 5, it references optometrists and ophthalmologists who “participate” in the Pediatric Vision Program. However, the bill does not have a trigger for “participating” and, given that it is only the creation of a central repository for reporting, there really is no program for participation. We believe it creates confusion in the bill.

Regarding the Vision for Maryland program, MSEPS strongly supports addressing unmet needs for pediatric eye care in Maryland. However, the creation of a Vision for Maryland program would likely apply vast resources to areas of the State where these needs may not exist as critically as in other areas. Instead, the State should support work to properly assess the areas of the State with the greatest needs and shortfalls in services rather than applying the program Statewide. We recognize that the bill does allow for a phase-in of five counties at a time; however, it is still predicated on the program being Statewide. Without this initial assessment, it is difficult to determine if \$2.5 million (budget appropriation) would be adequate or whether it would become an unfunded mandate.

Therefore, MSEPS supports Senate Bill 57; however, we urge the Committee to consider the issues raised above. Thank you.