



Secular Maryland

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HB 1054 - SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENT I

School Health and Vision Services - Screenings and Eye Examinations

Dear Chair Atterbeary, Vice-Chair Wilkins, and Members of the Ways and Means Committee,

Secular Maryland supports the changes to the law proposed by this bill that will help to ensure all children with vision problems that interfere with their ability to fully participate in school classes will be diagnosed and treated. We request that this bill be amended to remove the counter-productive religious belief exemption from Education §7-401

Maryland provides hearing and vision screening for all students in the first year of public school entry, first grade, and eighth or ninth grade. However, Education §7-401(g) declares that parents can deny their children a vision and hearing screening by claiming there is a conflict with their religious beliefs. The main goal of vision screening is to identify children who have or are at risk of developing strabismus (crossed eye) and/or amblyopia (lazy eye), which can lead to permanent visual impairment unless treated in early childhood. Between 2 and 5% of the population in western countries have strabismus and/or amblyopia. Additional problems that can be detected by vision screening include strabismus (eye misalignment), cataracts, glaucoma, ptosis (drooping eyelid), refractive errors such as myopia ("nearsightedness"), hyperopia ("farsightedness") and astigmatism, and other more serious conditions such as tumors or neurological diseases. Other states, including our immediate neighbors Pennsylvania and West Virginia, do not have such a religious exemption.

Respectfully,
Mathew Goldstein
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Bowie, MD