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Prince George's County

PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE

Executive Nominations Committee

Education, Energy and the
Environment Committee



THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

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February 13, 2024

Senate Bill 18 - Health Occupations – Pharmacists – Administration of Vaccines

Dear Colleagues,

I am pleased to present **Senate Bill 18 - Health Occupations – Pharmacists – Administration of Vaccines**, which seeks to safeguard the health of our youngest constituents in Maryland.

Since August of 2020, Maryland pharmacies have been at the forefront of public health by permitting pharmacists to administer routine vaccinations to children aged 3 to 17, aligning with the CDC's recommended schedule. Senate Bill 18 seeks to make permanent this practice, with a slight adjustment, by raising the minimum age to 5 in response to Pediatricians feedback on 3 year old well visits.

The federal government, through addendums to the Public Readiness and Emergency Preparedness (PREP) Act, empowered licensed pharmacists to administer FDA-approved vaccinations to children ages 3-17. This measure, initially a response to the pandemic, has proven effective and beneficial to our communities. However, this provision of the PREP Act is set to expire on December 31, 2024, and Senate Bill 18 endeavors to make this change permanent, following the lead of 43 other states.

The impact of this initiative is particularly noteworthy in areas characterized by high social vulnerability. According to the Government Accountability Office, half of the pharmacies that collaborated on COVID-19 vaccines were situated in such vulnerable areas. These pharmacies played a crucial role in delivering not only COVID-19 vaccinations but also protecting vulnerable populations against other childhood illnesses covered by the CDC schedule of vaccines.

Moreover, Senate Bill 18 addresses the accessibility gap in rural counties, where the availability of family physicians may be limited. Pharmacies, often more accessible, serve as a vital point of healthcare for many, with nearly 90% of the entire US population residing within 2 miles of a community pharmacy.

Our constituents have grown reliant on this accessibility, and it's worth noting that Maryland is among the minority, being one of only seven states yet to make this change permanent. Notably, a recent Morning Consult Poll indicates that 85% of Marylanders support empowering pharmacists to provide routine vaccinations.

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Senate Bill 18 not only codifies this practice but also establishes stringent guidelines to ensure the competence and preparedness of pharmacists. Pharmacists must complete at least 20 hours of training, covering adverse reactions to vaccines, hands-on injection techniques, and CPR certification. Additionally, pharmacists are required to upload vaccine information to ImmuNet, Maryland's HIPAA-compliant vaccine database.

This legislation reinforces the relationship between child patients, their caretakers, and pediatricians. Pharmacists are mandated to discuss the importance of well-child visits and, if necessary, refer the child to a primary care physician. With only 48.5% of Maryland children having a medical home, this provision becomes critical not only for vaccinations but also for fostering discussions about the necessity of routine well visits.

The Maryland Department of Health, in a report **supporting the permanent codification of pharmacists' authority to administer vaccines to children**, highlights the overall benefits of illness prevention, the effectiveness of vaccinations, and the importance of addressing health inequities. The report underscores the need for pharmacists to inform parents about routine well-child care through primary care providers.

This bill facilitates partnerships between pharmacies and primary care pediatricians, ensuring that parents receive essential immunizations for their children and are seamlessly connected with primary care providers for ongoing medical care. Senate Bill 18 simply extends a practice that our residents have come to rely on by permanently empowering pharmacists to provide FDA-approved vaccines to children aged 5 to 17. This initiative ensures the continued protection of our youngest residents from vaccine-preventable diseases.

Thank you for your attention to this critical matter. I urge the committee to give a **favorable** report for **Senate Bill 18 - Health Occupations – Pharmacists – Administration of Vaccines**.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Malcolm Augustine".

Senator Malcolm Augustine