



**MARYLAND ASSOCIATION
OF CHAIN DRUG STORES**

**SB18 Health Occupations - Pharmacists - Administration of Vaccines
Health and Government Operations Committee
March 21, 2024**

Position: Favorable as Amended

Background: SB18 would codify in Maryland law the existing federal authorization for pharmacists to administer vaccines to children without a physician's prescription.

Comments: The Maryland Association of Chain Drug Stores (MACDS) strongly supports passage of SB18 Health Occupations - Pharmacists - Administration of Vaccines. Families in Maryland have benefited greatly from expanded access to childhood vaccines since the federal Public Readiness and Emergency Preparedness (PREP) Act was amended in August, 2020 to authorize pharmacists throughout the United States to administer vaccines to children aged three and older without a physician's prescription. Before the expansion of the PREP Act, pharmacists in Maryland were authorized to administer influenza vaccines to children aged nine and older without a prescription, and to administer vaccinations listed in the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) recommended immunization schedule to children aged eleven to seventeen years old with a physician's prescription. The PREP Act was passed under the Trump administration in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and is not a permanent piece of federal policy. Its expiration date has been extended several times during the Biden administration and the vaccination authorization is currently in place through December 31, 2024. Unfortunately, patients' access to vaccines in Maryland will be greatly reduced after that date if the legislature fails to pass HB76/SB18, returning families in the state to the previous age and prescription restrictions.

The 2022 National Survey of Children's Health (NSCH), which measures the share of children who receive coordinated, ongoing, comprehensive care within a medical home, found that 51.5% of children in Maryland do not have a "medical home". The survey defined the percent of children with a medical home as the "percentage of children ages 0-17 who received health care that meets criteria of having a medical home: child had a personal doctor/nurse; had a usual source for sick care; received family-centered care from all health care providers; had no problems getting needed referrals; and received effective care coordination when needed".¹ The PREP Act has guaranteed that though over 50% of children in Maryland may not have an ongoing relationship with a physician, 100% of children aged three and older do have access to immunizations without having to depend on public resources such as clinics organized by the Department of Health.

Since 2019, Marylanders have received more than twenty-six million vaccines at their local community pharmacies, including nearly one and a half million vaccines

administered to children under age eighteen. This clearly demonstrates that patients trust pharmacists to care for children and adults, that families enjoy having the option to obtain immunizations in their community settings, and that pharmacies have the capacity to continue to offer these services. Moreover, community pharmacies have successfully expanded healthcare access and equity in both rural and urban communities that have been traditionally underserved. In 2018, nearly 90% of Americans lived within two miles of a community pharmacyⁱⁱ, and the study conducted by the Department of Health as mandated by 2021's HB1040 identified nineteen out of twenty-four jurisdictions in Maryland as having more pharmacists than pediatricians during the 2020-2021 period.

The COVID-19 pandemic exposed the challenges within the traditional healthcare system, but it also proved that pharmacies could provide Marylanders with patient-driven access to care that is safe and convenient. To keep up with patient demand during the pandemic, Maryland pharmacies quickly pivoted and set up new infrastructure and equipment needed in every community to perform mass COVID immunizations and testing, as well as administering the full range of childhood vaccines.

MACDS is aware of concerns regarding the impact of vaccine access in pharmacies on children's relationship with pediatricians in Maryland and agrees that a child's continued relationship with a physician is of the utmost importance. To that end, SB18 mandates that pharmacists remind families of the importance of attending annual check-ups and make recommendations for pediatricians when appropriate. **The language in SB18/HB76 has also been amended to address concerns about pediatricians' access and ability to identify major health issues in children from a young age. As amended, the base age for vaccines in pharmacies is three and up for influenza, COVID-19, and vaccinations for public health emergencies; and seven and up for other CDC-scheduled or FDA-approved vaccines.**

The public health policy that would be codified by SB18 has received overwhelming public support. A survey commissioned by the National Association of Chain Drug Stores and conducted by Morning Consult between December 7th through December 12th, 2022, found that 84% of Marylanders support pharmacists administering routine vaccinations. **SB18 does not impose any new vaccine mandates on Marylanders, and it honors the need for a guardian's consent while providing flexibility to account for children who may not be living with their parents at the time of immunization. Should SB18 pass, Maryland law (under Health General Article 18-4A) would still explicitly prohibit a non-parent from consenting to the immunization of a child if the parent's refusal of consent has been expressed.** SB18 is ultimately a proposal to codify patient choice and healthcare access for those who desire additional vaccine options for their own family within their community.

We are extremely grateful for the Committee's thoughtful leadership and continued dedication to patient healthcare access. SB18 will protect your constituents' option to receive immunizations at their local pharmacy and maintain expanded healthcare access and equity in all Maryland communities. We would respectfully urge your favorable vote on this proposal.

ⁱ *Percent of Children with a Medical Home* | KFF. (2023c, December 7). KFF. <https://www.kff.org/other/state-indicator/children-with-a-medical-home/>

ⁱⁱ *Pharmacist-administered pediatric vaccination services in the United States: major barriers and potential solutions for the outpatient setting*. Pharm Pract (Granada) [Internet]. 2019 Jun. 18; 17(2):1581. <https://www.pharmacypractice.org/index.php/pp/article/view/1581>