



Wes Moore, Governor · Aruna Miller, Lt. Governor · Laura Herrera Scott, M.D., M.P.H., Secretary

February 21, 2024

The Honorable Vanessa E. Atterbeary
Chair, Ways and Means Committee
Room 131, House Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401-1991

RE: House Bill 893 – Primary and Secondary Students – Vision and Hearing Studies and Evaluations – Letter of Information

Dear Chair Atterbeary and Committee members:

The Maryland Department of Health (Department) respectfully submits this letter of information for House Bill (HB) 893 – Primary and Secondary Student - Vision and Hearing Studies and Evaluations. The purpose of HB 893 is to require the State Department of Education (MSDE) in collaboration with the Department to convene a workgroup to study and make recommendations on vision support services and treatments for students, and require the Maryland State School Health Council to evaluate certain issues regarding vision and hearing difficulties in primary and secondary students.

Periodic hearing and vision (H/V) screenings are integral in pediatric preventive health care. Maryland statute currently mandates that each county board or county health department provide H/V screenings to students in the public schools upon entry into the school system, the first grade, and the eighth or ninth grade.¹ However, the true effectiveness of these screening programs is limited due to a lack of student follow-up after a referral is made. Based on data from the 2022-2023 Annual School Health Services Survey, within 19 jurisdictions, there was a 67% loss to follow-up after a student was recommended to receive a more comprehensive eye evaluation and a 78% loss to follow-up for those that required a hearing evaluation.²

HB 893 aims to understand the factors that impede follow-up to ophthalmologic or audiology services after H/V screenings and to make recommendations to address identified barriers. While this additional understanding is a laudable goal, the requirements of the workgroup and the study envisioned by HB 893 will have operational and fiscal impacts on the Department that cannot be absorbed within the current budget. Due to the nature and extent of the bill's requirements, the Department will need additional staff to support the work group, conduct studies, and develop

¹ Maryland General Assembly. (2023). Article 7-404. In *Annotated Code of Maryland: Education*. Retrieved from https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/2023RS/Statute_Web/ged/ged.pdf

² Hearing and Vision Screening, Follow up and Reporting in Maryland Schools: Summary of Office of School Health Interviews and Annual Survey Data. (February 2024). Maryland Dept of Health.

the required reports in collaboration with Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE). The Department estimates that the total costs to operationalize HB 893 will be \$110,765 for fiscal year (FY) 2025 and \$92,853 for FY 2026. These numbers do not take into account any potential administrative costs for MSDE.

If you would like to discuss this further, please do not hesitate to contact Sarah Case-Herron, Director of Governmental Affairs at sarah.case-herron@maryland.gov.

Sincerely,



Laura Herrera Scott, M.D., M.P.H.
Secretary