



January 23, 2024

The Honorable Vanessa E. Atterbeary
Chair, House Ways and Means
Committee
Taylor House Office Building, Room 131
6 Bladen St., Annapolis, MD 21401

The Honorable Jheanelle K. Wilkins
Vice Chair, House Ways and Means
Committee
Taylor House Office Building, Room 131
6 Bladen St., Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear Chair Atterbeary and Vice Chair Wilkins,

On behalf of the Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America (AAFA), I am writing in support of HB86, an Act concerning Public and Nonpublic Schools – Auto-Injectable Epinephrine and Bronchodilators – Use, Availability, Training, and Policies. This bill will improve the health and safety of schoolchildren in Maryland who are living with asthma by allowing school nurses and trained personnel to help manage asthma attacks and mitigate the risk of serious injury or death from asthma and anaphylaxis. It also requires updates to existing policies related to training and administration of auto-injectable epinephrine, improving the health and safety of schoolchildren with food allergies or other severe allergies.

AAFA is the leading patient organization advocating for people with asthma and allergies, and the oldest asthma and allergy patient group in the world. Currently, there are about 4.5 million children under the age of 18 with asthma.¹ Asthma is the leading cause of missed school days due to chronic illness. Asthma affects children of all ages, races, and ethnicities, but its burden is particularly harsh for children of color: in 2015, Black children under age 15 had a death rate from asthma ten times that of non-Hispanic white children,² and

¹ National Center for Health Statistics. (2023). *2022 NHIS Child Summary Health Statistics*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. <https://data.cdc.gov/d/wxz7-ekz9>

² Office of Minority Health. *Asthma and African Americans*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Available at: <https://minorityhealth.hhs.gov/omh/browse.aspx?lvl=4&lvlid=15>



minority children with asthma have higher rates of hospitalization, ER visits, and mortality than white children.³

In a given year, more than half of all children with asthma experience an asthma attack, a sudden worsening of symptoms that can lead to a life-threatening emergency if not treated promptly and appropriately.⁴ Bronchodilators are an inhaled medication that treat asthma attacks by relaxing and opening the airways.

It is vital that school nurses and other school personnel are trained to recognize asthma symptoms and that bronchodilators are available to treat asthma episodes in the school setting. While every state permits students to self-carry bronchodilators,⁵ children do not always have this medication prescribed or immediately available, and self-carrying is not appropriate for all children, particularly the very young. The CDC therefore recommends that schools maintain stock medication to address asthma attacks promptly.⁶

Fortunately, states are starting to take this important step. AAFA conducts periodic reviews of state policies to address asthma and allergy in schools. In 2016, we started tracking whether states permit or require schools to stock undesignated bronchodilators: that year, nine states permitted schools to do so, and one state required schools to do so.⁷ Today, eighteen states either permit or require schools to stock undesignated bronchodilators.⁸

³ Anna Volerman, Marshall H. Chin and Valerie G. Press. Solutions for Asthma Disparities. *Pediatrics* March 2017, 139 (3) e20162546; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2016-2546>

⁴ Mayo Clinic, "Asthma Attack." Available at <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/asthma-attack/symptoms-causes/syc-20354268>

⁵ Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America, "2019 Honor Roll: Asthma and Allergy Policies for Schools" (2019). Available at www.aafa.org/media/2477/aafa-2019-state-honor-roll-report.pdf

⁶ CDC, "Strategies for Addressing Asthma in Schools." Available at www.cdc.gov/asthma/pdfs/strategies_for_addressing_asthma_in_schools_508.pdf

⁷ Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America, "2016 Honor Roll: Asthma and Allergy Policies for Schools" (2016). Available at www.aafa.org/media/1360/2016-state-honor-roll-report-asthma-allergy-policies-in-schools.pdf

⁸ Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America, "Albuterol in Schools" (2023). Available at <https://aafa.org/advocacy/key-issues/access-to-medications/albuterol-in-schools/>.



Asthma and Allergy
Foundation of America

We urge Maryland to join this list to protect the health of its children living with asthma as well as allergies. Thank you very much for your time and attention. We stand ready to provide any further information to help support this important proposal.

Sincerely,

Kenneth Mendez
President and Chief Executive Officer
Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America