



**2025 SESSION
POSITION PAPER**

BILL: HB 608 – Primary and Secondary Education – Student Immunization – Temporary Admission Period
COMMITTEE: House - Ways and Means Committee
POSITION: Letter of Concern
BILL ANALYSIS: HB 608 would require each county board of education to grant certain students temporary admission to schools for a specified time frame if the parent or guardian is unable to provide proof of immunization under certain circumstances; and generally relating to immunization requirements for public school students.

POSITION RATIONALE: The Maryland Association of County Health Officers (MACHO) provides a Letter of Concern regarding HB 608. Childhood immunization is a critical defense against the resurgence of vaccine-preventable diseases. MACHO recognizes the importance of ensuring school access for all students, particularly those facing barriers to healthcare. However, the proposed extension of the grace period from the current 20 days to 60 days would increase the risk of disease transmission in communities. School immunization is readily available and accessible to all community members through our local public health departments (LHDs).

The proposed extension would leave children, teachers, and families vulnerable to outbreaks of diseases such as measles, pertussis (whooping cough), and varicella (chickenpox), which spread rapidly in school settings. These diseases pose severe risks to unvaccinated and immunocompromised individuals, including infants and those undergoing medical treatments that suppress immunity. A single case of measles, which is highly contagious, can trigger an outbreak requiring extensive public health interventions, school closures, and costly contact tracing efforts.

All LHDs report ample appointment availability to meet school system needs. Maryland's 20-day grace period provides sufficient time for families to obtain required vaccinations. LHDs and school health services work collaboratively to ensure that children receive vaccinations promptly, even in the most vulnerable communities. LHDs and school-based health clinics offer extensive immunization services, conduct outreach to families, and work with providers to remove barriers to access. Expansion of the grace period undermines these efforts, which could delay vaccination further and increase non-compliance.

Prolonged delays in vaccination can lead to disruptions in education. An outbreak could force schools to exclude unvaccinated students for extended periods, disproportionately impacting educational access for the very students the bill seeks to support. Maryland has made significant progress in maintaining high immunization rates among school-aged children, and HB 608 threatens to reverse these gains.

LHDs and students would benefit from strengthening immunization programs through enhanced school-based vaccination programs, increased funding for public health outreach, and targeted assistance for families experiencing barriers to compliance. MACHO would welcome the opportunity to work collaboratively on policies that balance equitable school access with Maryland's strong commitment to public health.

For the reasons outlined above, MACHO submits this LOC for HB 608. For more information, please contact Ruth Maiorana, MACHO Executive Director at rmaiora1@jhu.edu or 410-937-1433. *This communication reflects the position of MACHO.*
