



Wes Moore, Governor · Aruna Miller, Lt. Governor · Ryan Moran, Dr.PH, Acting Secretary

March 5, 2025

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

RE: House Bill 1242 – Primary and Secondary Students - Vision and Hearing Studies and Evaluations – Letter of Concern

Dear Chair Atterbeary and Committee members:

The Maryland Department of Health (the Department) respectfully submits this letter of concern for House Bill (HB) 1242 – Primary and Secondary Students - Vision and Hearing Studies and Evaluations. This bill requires the State Department of Education, in collaboration with the Department, to convene a workgroup to study and make recommendations on vision support treatments and services for students; requires the workgroup to report its findings and recommendations on or before December 31, 2026; and requires the Maryland State School Health Council (MSSHC) to evaluate certain issues regarding vision and hearing difficulties in primary and secondary students.

The Department agrees that strategies are needed for addressing barriers to appropriate evaluation and treatment services for students who do not pass hearing and vision screening. However, the Department is concerned about the extensive number and scope of studies required by HB 1242. The Department will need additional staff to support the workgroup in accomplishing these tasks in collaboration with the Maryland State Department of Education. Furthermore, the MSSHC is composed of volunteers from state and local agencies and other organizations. Their mission is to promote health for the whole child through health-promoting programs and policies by providing leadership and support to local school health councils and state and local agencies.¹ The evaluation component of the bill tasks the MSSHC with responsibilities beyond its usual scope.

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

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https://www.marylandpublicschools.org/about/Documents/MSSHC/MarylandStateSchoolHealthCouncilBylaws_092018.pdf

grade, and the eighth or ninth grade.² However, the effectiveness of these programs is limited by the number of follow-up after referrals. Based on data from the 2023-2024 Annual School Health Services Survey, across 23 jurisdictions, there was an average loss to follow-up of 65% after a student was recommended to receive a more comprehensive eye evaluation and a 60% loss to follow-up for those that required a hearing evaluation.³

When students fail screenings, parents are notified and advised to seek comprehensive eye or hearing exams. Local school health staff work to follow up, but many students do not receive these evaluations, or the results are not shared with the school. Barriers to follow-up or follow-through include limited access to providers, financial obstacles, communication challenges, and insufficient school staff resources.

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,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Ryan B. Moran". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a horizontal line drawn underneath the name.

Ryan Moran, Dr. P.H., MHSA
Acting Secretary

² 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>

³ Hearing and Vision Screening, Follow up and Reporting in Maryland Schools: Summary of Office of School Health Interviews and Annual Survey Data. (September 2024). Maryland Dept of Health.