



**Testimony of Catherine Carter
FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS
SB965: Blueprint for Maryland's Future - Revision
Monday, March 15, 2021**

My name is Catherine Carter. I am a vision and student behavioral health advocate who works on policy and legislative change to improve identification of behavioral health needs and access to healthcare. I am also Project Manager of the Howard County "Beyond 20/20" Program, a collaborative public and private partnership that is working to bring awareness and needed eye care services to underserved/uninsured Howard County Public School System ("HCPSS") students. Distinguished members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak today favorable with amendments SB965 to ensure that the Blueprint fully addresses the behavioral health needs of our students.

Because of COVID, whether due to quarantine, loss of income/healthcare, many students have been disconnected from local health providers. Students have missed well checks, vision/hearing screenings, dental care, mental health. Lack of behavioral health is having a significant impact on our students physical and mental health, which directly impacts their social-emotional and academics. As students return to the classroom, schools should coordinate with local healthcare providers to close these gaps, especially for schools that lack a school-based health center.

For our Howard County vision clinic, we surveyed what barriers parents faced when trying their referred student an eye exam and what resource was most effective. Parents said **knowing both the importance of an eye exam** on their student's academics and well-being through informational campaign by the school nurses greatly encouraged parents to either attend the clinic or go to a local eye doctor. They also said a **list of local eye doctors** with contact information who would take vouchers, Medicaid, had flexible hours for working parents, specialized in pediatric care, and took their private insurance besides the glasses was the best thing they got for follow up vision care. Out of 160+ students a 110+ were prescribed glasses. These children will need a lifetime of follow up healthcare to ensure their prescriptions are up to date to see to learn.

(a) Each county board of education, including Baltimore City, shall use funds 2 provided in fiscal years 2021 and 2022 to address trauma and behavioral health issues due 3 to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on students and their families and to identify and 4 provide necessary supports and services for students.

5 (b) To the extent practicable, county boards are encouraged to utilize 6 school-based health centers to coordinate and deliver services to students.

Amendments:

- **Schools should work to help connect and reconnect students to local healthcare providers**
- **Encouraging the importance of a healthy student through a public awareness campaign**
- **Identify students in need of behavioral health services**
- **Part of the funding should be used to do hearing/vision screenings for students who missed upon entry to school, 1st grade, and 8/9th grade**
- **School systems should also use best practices when developing their COVID plans, and the Consortium should be tasked to develop those recommendations to help school districts**
- **The COVID response needs to align with the recommendations of medical professionals**

A Healthy Student means Healthy Mind, Healthy Body, Healthy Smile, Healthy Ears, Healthy Eyes. If we want our students to succeed, then we need to help ensure that their behavioral health needs are addressed.