

## SUPPORT

### HB1233 - Public School Students - Vision Services and the Vision for Maryland Program

March 8, 2022

Chairwoman Atterbeary, Vice-chair Washington and Ways and Means Committee Members,

THE BUCK STOPS HERE, or at least it should. That is why HB1233 is introduced.

THE PROBLEM – that many Maryland primary and secondary school children with vision problems never receive the glasses necessary for them to see well enough to read well enough to learn. HB1233 differs from previous legislation before this committee seeking to address it in several ways, and by building on the commitment and foundation of the Blueprint for Maryland's Future

**HB1233**, the work product of a multi-stakeholder groups including ophthalmologists, optometrists representatives of the state school boards, State superintendents, state local public health officers, state and local libraries, vision advocates, and community service organizations would:

- Establish the Vision for Maryland program to provide vision exams and prescribed glasses for students who have fallen through the cracks and connect them with local providers and resources for ongoing and long-term follow-up and management;
- Establish the Pediatric Vision Program, modeled on voluntary reporting of eye exam results to the Maryland Motor Vehicle Association, to facilitate reporting of eye exam findings and identify students and families in need of direction and support to get the needed vision aids;
- Add additional vision screenings for students in public schools;
- Standardize base on local jurisdiction best practices the information shared with families regarding vision screenings, vision exams, and resources available for obtaining indicated exams and glasses;
- Modify the school registration and intake health forms to better identify students who have requiring a certain health form to include space for certain information;
- Task designees of the Maryland Department of Education and the Maryland Department of Health to collaborate in identifying and partnering throughout the state with local resources, and with the Vision for Baltimore subsidiary of Vision to Learn to expand the current programs that are successfully filling the gaps in vision care so that every jurisdiction will have what they need to ensure that no child needing glass is without a way of receiving them.

With the submitted amendment, the additional screenings, establishment of the Pediatric Vision Program, and updating school forms would go into effect in 2022 and the establishment of the Vision for Maryland program would be delayed until fall 2024 to give MDE, MDE, Vision for Baltimore, the Maryland Optometric Association and other stakeholders time to do a needs study, determine the best plan to roll out the program so that jurisdictions with the greatest need are prioritized earlier, and coordinate with local school systems, public health departments, providers, and community resources in customizing the program to local needs.

HB12333 mandates a minimal annual appropriation, which will be money well invested, after all you can't expect Johnny (or Janie) to learn if they can't read because they can't properly see. Between 30 and 70% of students who fail vision screenings fail to either get the vision exams to diagnose the problem or the glasses that they need. This is not isolated to a particular socioeconomic level. The reasons vary, and is not always related to family income, but the result is the same. By making sure that the students identified and then shown as needing glasses actually get them, we make a small upstream investment that can lead to huge downstream benefits for the student, the community and our state, at a much lower cost than waiting until than the costs associated with education failures.

I respectfully urge a favorable report.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "L. J. ...", written in a cursive style.