



TESTIMONY TO THE WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEE

HB 1233: Public Schools- Health and Vision Services- Required Screenings and Eye Examinations

POSITION: Support

BY: Nancy Soreng, President

DATE: March 8, 2022

The League of Women Voters supports **House Bill 1233: Public Schools- Health and Vision Services- Required Screenings and Eye Examinations.**

Per an October 2011 article in the Journal of School Health:
-More than 20% of school-aged youth have some kind of vision problem.... When diagnosed with eye care problems, Black youth living in poverty received fewer and less intensive services. Causal pathways through which vision problems adversely affect academic achievement include sensory perceptions, cognition, and school connectedness. Vision screening is widespread in the nation's schools, but the educational (and public health) benefits from these efforts are jeopardized by lack of follow-up and coordination of efforts.

House Bill 1233 seeks to address this lack of follow-up and coordination of efforts, which adversely affects our children.

Maryland law mandates periodic vision screening tests for all students in public schools upon entry to school, in first grade, and in eighth or ninth grade. If a child fails a screening test, the parents are notified and are advised to arrange for a comprehensive eye exam with a pediatric optometrist or ophthalmologist who participates in the Pediatric Vision program. Only a comprehensive eye exam with a licensed provider can

diagnose a child's visual problem and determine whether glasses or another corrective device is needed.

Students with neurodevelopmental disorders such as Down Syndrome, a family history of eye diseases, or those with medical issues such as diabetes or a history of premature birth are particularly at risk for vision problems.

House Bill 1233 will add another vision screening, for students in third or fourth grade, and will also require that screening be done when an Individualized Education Program or 504 plan is established for a child. The **Vision for Maryland Program** will be created to ensure that all children who need vision support services receive them. It will also act as a central repository of information on students' vision needs, helping coordinate communication and interventions on behalf of the student between the school, parents, and the pediatric optometrist.

The current school vision screening system is not strong and comprehensive enough to benefit all of the Maryland school children who need vision services. **Too many students fail to receive the help they need in order to succeed in school- even if it's a need as fundamental, and simple, as a pair of glasses.** Although the Affordable Care Act considers pediatric vision care an essential health benefit, and thus comprehensive pediatric eye exams are covered, **glasses are not always included as a benefit.**

This is an equity issue. The League of Women Voters believes that equity is an approach based on fairness, which ensures that everyone is given equal opportunity, and that each person has a fair chance to succeed. **It is important that all children in our state receive the vision services they need to succeed.**

The League urges the committee to give a favorable report to HOUSE BILL 1233.