



TO: The Honorable Vanessa E. Atterbary, Chair
Members, House Ways and Means Committee
The Honorable Terri L. Hill

FROM: Danna L. Kauffman
Pamela Metz Kasemeyer
J. Steven Wise

DATE: March 8, 2022

RE: **SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENT** –House Bill 1233 – *Public Schools – Health and Vision Services – Required Screenings and Eye Examinations*

The Maryland Society of Eye Physicians and Surgeons (MSEPS) is the professional organization of medical doctors who practice ophthalmology in the State of Maryland. Maryland is a world-renowned center for the training of ophthalmologists including the Wilmer Eye Institute at Johns Hopkins University. MSEPS **supports with amendments** House Bill 1233.

MSEPS thanks the sponsor for her commitment to eye care in Maryland. As indicated below, MSEPS does support the following proposals contained in the legislation:

- Creation of a student health form that includes a place to describe any health issue, including vision issues, that may adversely affect academic performance.
- The proposed expansion of vision screening to an additional grade above and beyond the current state mandate of first entry to school, first grade and eighth or ninth grade. Conducting vision screenings in an interim year of 3rd or 4th grade is important to close the present 7-year gap between vision screenings in the present law.

However, while MSEPS supports increasing access to eye screenings and vision services through the positions above, we remain concerned regarding several provisions in the bill and request that they be removed from the bill.

- Requiring vision screenings for students with individualized education plans (IEP) may not be enough; many of these children need a complete eye exam with an optometrist or ophthalmologist skilled in the examination of children.
- While MSEPS supports comprehensive eye exams and treatment for children who fail a vision screening, it is likely beyond the scope of any county board to “ensure” that students receive eye exams and treatment.
- MSEPS does not support a baseline eye exam before school entry for all students. Instead we support comprehensive eye exams for children who fail the vision screening. Efforts should be focused on these children who have failed the screening and on increasing the frequency of vision screenings

throughout childhood. County boards and health departments should not be tasked with keeping up to date lists of optometrists and ophthalmologists.

- While we agree with the benefit of increasing communication between ophthalmologists/optometrists and school staff, a central repository for health information is resource intensive and should be removed from the bill. We do, however, support establishing a repository for results of vision screenings and eye exams to be able to track the rate of follow up care obtained by children who fail vision screenings.
- MSEPS supports addressing unmet needs for pediatric eye care in Maryland. However, the creation of a Vision for Maryland program would likely apply vast resources to areas of the State where these needs do not exist. Rather, the State should support work to properly assess the best ways to address the pediatric eye care needs in the State. Therefore, this section should be removed.

Therefore, we urge the Committee to take into account the issues raised above when considering House Bill 1233. Thank you.

For more information call:

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