

HOUSE BILL

**HB1233**

**Public Schools – Health and Vision Services – Required Screenings and Eye 3  
Examinations**

**Sponsor: Delegate Hill**

**WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEE**

**HEARING DATE: MARCH 8, 2022**

TESTIMONY BY:

**VISION IMPACT INSTITUTE**

**POSITION: SUPPORT WITH AMMENDMENTS**

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## Re: HB1233 – Health and Vision Services – Required Screenings and Eye Examinations

The [Vision Impact Institute](#) is a global **non-profit** organization that raises awareness about the importance of vision correction and protection to make good vision a global priority. Through the U.S. [Kids See: Success Initiative](#) we advocate for children to receive vision examinations before entering school and throughout their school years of development. Since **80% of all learning** is acquired through the eyes, **vision problems directly affect children’s learning and have additional socio-economic effects.**

The proposed bill will be a step forward into the path of a comprehensive children’s vision legislation in Maryland, **when taking into consideration the following:**

### 7–404 (B) (I) - adding school vision screenings in 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> grade

- Additional vision screenings requirements at other grade levels will help reduce the gap in helping Maryland students to receive more adequate vision care needed to succeed in the classroom at critical milestones in their development.
- This is particularly true today, since during the recent COVID-19 pandemic school-based vision screenings **were halted** while children were more than ever exposing their eyes to **increased screen time** and at potentially higher risk to damage their vision, or being undiagnosed.

### 7–404 (C) Eye Examination for IEP Program vs. Vision screenings

- Approximately **60% of “problem learners”** are believed to suffer from undetected or untreated visual problems. Some studies have found that as many as 40% of students diagnosed with a learning disability actually have a vision issue, not a learning disability. *Gross, Kristan, Success in School Tied to Healthy Vision: What Educators Need to Know. NJEA Review, February 2018.*
- Therefore, provision 7–404 (C) must ensure every student in elementary or secondary school **prior being considered for entry** into Section 504, Title I Reading or **Individualized Education Program** are referred directly to receive a **complete and thorough eye health examination and not a vision screening.** In fact, the **National Academies of Science, Engineering and Medicine** recommendation is for comprehensive eye exams as the **“gold standard”** to detect vision disorders in children, which are fundamentally different from a school vision screenings.

- A proper eye health examination will also avoid costly misdiagnosed cases for school districts and children wrongly placed in special education programs.

#### **7-404.1 Pediatric Vision Program**

- Current and future school vision screening requirements and guidelines must require a **stronger follow-up referral system that would ensure that children who fail the school screening receive an eye examination by an eye care provider** and receive intervention (eyeglasses) when needed and/or appropriate support recommendations for the classroom.
- The **National Eye Institute** at NIH recognizes that **30% of children** with eye or vision problems are missed using even the most advanced vision-screening technologies. Therefore, disorders such as strabismus, amblyopia, and significant refractive error in children can be undiagnosed, which may result in late detection of vision disorders or potential vision loss.
- A **stronger follow up system and guidelines** in school vision screenings ensures the collection of data from concerning the results of the original screenings, referral outcomes, and better coordination so that children with potential vision problems will receive an adequate evaluation and early intervention.

#### **7-404.2 Vision for Maryland Program**

- The bill should promote the utilization of programs that are already in place such as the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), Medicaid and the Affordable Care Act, programs that provide coverage for children's eye examinations and promote continuity of care **at no added cost**.
- Eye exams and eyeglasses are provided at no cost to **underserved children and families** by many philanthropic organization programs. Student parents or guardians shall be provided with a list of all organizations offering such programs.
- A broader and more coordinated program including all organizations providing no cost/low cost vision care outreach services should be considered when expanding vision support services for public school students in Maryland.

We thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony that will improve the quality of children's vision and their academic performance in the classroom.

Sincerely,



Kristan Gross

Global Executive Director Vision

Impact Institute

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