



House Bill 798

Visual Impairments - Requirements for Student Screening

MACo Position: **OPPOSE**

To: Ways & Means Committee

Date: February 22, 2018

From: Kevin Kinnally

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **OPPOSES** HB 798. This bill would require local boards of education and local health departments to substantially expand student vision screenings. The new screenings would be designed to detect a wide swath of possible symptoms indicating potential vision disorders. Counties are concerned this legislation places a substantial administrative and cost burden onto local health departments. Without state resources to offset these potentially large costs, the bill represents an unfunded mandate on local governments.

Local health departments and local boards of education currently provide student vision screenings to test for myopia, color vision, and depth perception. HB 798 requires an expansion of student vision screenings that would require comprehensive eye examinations in order to diagnose visual disorders.

As a rule, MACo resists state policies that result in costly or burdensome local implementation. This bill would result in substantial costs to local health departments, which are charged with hiring additional staff and purchasing equipment capable of screening for vision disorders such as anisocoria, astigmatism, and convergence insufficiency. Local health departments indicate costs will increase by millions of dollars annually. Furthermore, the process of training employees to use new equipment, providing notifications and educational materials to parents or guardians, and preparing reports for the Maryland Department of Health will take a substantial amount of time, which could divert resources from other local health care efforts.

Under state law, counties have no choice but to fund these costs – competing for limited local funds against education, public safety, roadway maintenance, and other essential public services.

This bill would place a costly mandate on county governments to carry out new state policy. Accordingly, without funds and possible technical assistance to suitably implement the bill's requirements, MACo urges the Committee to issue an **UNFAVORABLE** report on HB 798.