



House Bill 1375

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

MACo Position: **OPPOSE**

To: Ways and Means Committee

Date: March 6, 2020

From: Drew Jabin

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **OPPOSES** HB 1375. This bill would require local boards of education and local health departments to substantially expand student vision screenings.

Counties are concerned this legislation places a substantial administrative and cost burden onto local health departments and/or county boards of education. Without state resources to offset these potentially large costs, the bill represents an unfunded mandate on local governments to fund board of education costs.

Local health departments and local boards of education currently provide student vision screenings to test for myopia, color vision, and depth perception. HB 1375 requires an expansion of student vision evaluations for those who fail their vision screening. The bill also would unfairly require local boards of education or health departments to provide corrective glasses free of charge, with no additional funding provided.

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 either installing optometry offices in each school or purchasing mobile vision clinic vehicles to provide these services. Local health departments indicate costs will increase by millions of dollars annually.

Furthermore, the process of training employees to use new equipment and providing notifications and educational materials to parents or guardians could divert resources from other local health care efforts.

Although boards of education may coordinate with the proposed Vision for Maryland Program under this bill, there is no accompanying funding guaranteed from any of the offered sources. Under state law, school boards (and therefore 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 1375**.