

BILL: Senate Bill 570
TITLE: Vision Disorders - Requirements for Student Screening - Revisions
POSITION: OPPOSE
DATE: February 21, 2018
COMMITTEE: Education, Health and Environmental Affairs Committee
CONTACT: John R. Woolums, Esq.

The Maryland Association of Boards of Education (MABE), representing all of the State's local boards of education, opposes Senate Bill 570.

Local boards of education support and promote policies intended to ensure the highest level of student health and safety. MABE appreciates the intent of this legislation to guarantee that students entering school have received high quality hearing and vision screenings. However, we believe that the existing law already provides the appropriate level of mandatory vision and hearing screenings.

MABE supports maintaining the current law, under §7-404 of the Education Article, which requires student hearing and vision screenings. For many years the requirements were for grades four, five, or six and grade nine. More recently these requirements were updated to require vision screenings upon entering school, in grade one, and grade eight or nine. Clearly, school systems, in accordance with existing statute, are appropriately required to promptly assess each student's hearing and vision health condition.

MABE is most concerned about the potential burden of having to comply with the much more complex set of vision screening requirements outlined in Senate Bill 570; requirements which would specify 11 different vision conditions. According to the American Academy of Ophthalmology this bill would convert the law's longstanding requirement for a school vision screening into a comprehensive medical eye exam. Most importantly, the American Academy of Ophthalmology recommends such comprehensive eye exams not for all children, but primarily for children who fail a vision screening.

In addition, the comprehensive eye exam is recommended for students in the following specific circumstances: students who are referred by a pediatrician or school nurse; students with a vision complaint or observed abnormal visual behavior; and students with medical conditions (e.g., Down syndrome, prematurity, juvenile idiopathic arthritis, neurofibromatosis). Based on these criteria, MABE does not believe that medical eye exams are warranted for all students relative to the value and information provided by the current array of school vision screenings.

For these reasons, MABE requests an unfavorable report on Senate Bill 570.