

BILL: Senate Bill 915
TITLE: Public School Students - Vision Services and the Vision for Maryland Program
POSITION: SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENTS
DATE: March 13, 2019
COMMITTEE: Education, Health and Environmental Affairs Committee
CONTACT: John R. Woolums, Esq.

The Maryland Association of Boards of Education (MABE) supports Senate Bill 915 with amendments.

Local boards of education support and promote policies intended to ensure the highest level of student health and safety. Therefore, MABE supports this bill's proposal to establish the Vision for Maryland Program in the Maryland Department of Health (MDH) to provide eye examinations and eyeglasses to public school students.

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.

Under this bill, the State would be required to administer the Vision for Maryland Program in consultation with Johns Hopkins University, local boards of education, and local health departments. The program would provide eye examinations to students who fail the required vision screening and eyeglasses if determined necessary by the examination. These services would be provided (1) at no cost to the student or the student's parent or legal guardian; (2) on the premises of the school in which the student is enrolled; and (3) after the program receives written consent for the examination from the student's parent or legal guardian.

However, MABE does request amendments to ensure that the administration and costs arising from this program would be borne not by local school systems, or at least not solely by the school system, but primarily by the State and local health departments. Specifically, on page 3 in line 16 the reference to the county board should include the local health department to sure that both the school system and health department are responsible for coordinating this program. In addition, MABE seeks a clarifying amendment that the Vision for Maryland Program may not be authorized to impose costs on a local school system for the services provided.

For these reasons, MABE requests a favorable report on Senate Bill 915, with the amendments described above.