

Department of Legislative Services
 Maryland General Assembly
 2018 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
 First Reader

House Bill 798 (Delegate Kittleman, *et al.*)
 Ways and Means

Visual Impairments - Requirements for Student Screening

This bill expands student vision screenings by requiring the administration of a screening (for symptoms of specified vision disorders) designed to detect visual impairments. Unless exempted, as specified, the required screening must be administered following the current law schedule. The bill alters notice requirements such that notice and specified educational materials must be given to parents *or guardians* for *all* students receiving hearing and vision screenings. For students who fail the screening for visual impairments, a separate letter containing, among other things, a detailed summary of the potential vision disorder and how it may affect the student’s educational performance must be provided. **The bill takes effect July 1, 2018.**

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: General fund expenditures increase by \$63,700 in FY 2019 and by \$55,200 in FY 2020 for a contractual position. Revenues are not affected.

(in dollars)	FY 2019	FY 2020	FY 2021	FY 2022	FY 2023
Revenues	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
GF Expenditure	63,700	55,200	0	0	0
Net Effect	(\$63,700)	(\$55,200)	\$0	\$0	\$0

Note:() = decrease; GF = general funds; FF = federal funds; SF = special funds; - = indeterminate increase; (-) = indeterminate decrease

Local Effect: Significant increase in expenditures for local health departments (LHDs) and local boards of education beginning in FY 2019 to hire staff and purchase equipment to perform the required screenings. Local revenues are not affected. **This bill imposes a mandate on a unit of local government.**

Small Business Effect: Minimal.

Analysis

Bill Summary: Under the bill, a required visual impairment screening must screen, at a minimum, for the symptoms of multiple specified vision disorders. The screening must be administered unless evidence is presented that a student has been tested *by an optometrist or ophthalmologist or screened for symptoms of specified vision disorders* within the past year. Additionally, a student of a parent or guardian who objects in writing to a screening for visual impairments on the ground of a religious conflict may not be required to take the screening.

The bill repeals the current law requirement for the parent or guardian of a student who does not pass a hearing or vision screening to report to the local board of education or LHD on the recommended services received by the student. The bill requires the local board of education or LHD to report results from screening for visual impairments to the Maryland Department of Health (MDH).

Current Law: Each local board of education or LHD must provide hearing and vision screenings for all students in local public schools, and each LHD must provide and fund the screenings for private and nonpublic schools in the jurisdiction. Unless evidence is presented that a student has been tested within the past year, the screenings must take place in the years that a child enters a school system, enters the first grade, and enters the eighth or ninth grade. Further screenings must be done in accordance with the bylaws adopted by the State Board of Education or policies adopted by a local board of education or LHD.

Results of screenings go in each child's permanent record, are given to the parents of any student who fails the screenings, and are reported to the local board of education or LHD. The parent or guardian of a student who does not pass a screening must report on the recommended services received by the student, and the report must be submitted on a form provided by the local board of education or LHD. The local board of education or LHD must report the results of screenings and the number of students receiving recommended services to MDH. A student whose parent or guardian objects in writing to a hearing or vision screening on religious grounds may not be required to take the screening.

Background: Vision screenings are provided by either the local school board or LHD, depending on the jurisdiction. LHDs conduct screenings in all but four jurisdictions. In one jurisdiction, the local school system contracts with a local hospital to perform the screenings. Vision screenings test for myopia, color vision, and depth perception. These routine screenings do not test all visual skills or for symptoms of visual disorders. However, the Maryland State Department of Education notes that several of the screenings required under the bill are currently considered to be optional screening tests based on a school's available resources and student population.

The American Academy of Ophthalmology (AAO) [advises](#) that good vision is key to a child’s physical development, success in school, and overall well-being. The vision system is not fully formed in babies and young children, and equal input from both eyes is necessary for the brain’s vision centers to develop normally. If a young child’s eyes cannot send clear images to the brain, his or her vision may become limited in ways that cannot be corrected later in life. However, if problems are detected early, it is usually possible to treat them effectively. AAO [notes](#) that some symptoms of vision problems are not obvious. For example, a vision problem could result in a child having a short attention span, losing his or her place when reading, avoiding reading and other close activities, and turning his or her head to the side.

State Expenditures: General fund expenditures for MDH increase by \$63,666 in fiscal 2019, which accounts for the bill’s July 1, 2018 effective date. This estimate reflects the cost of hiring one full-time contractual program manager to coordinate the required vision screenings throughout the State, establish policies, oversee implementation of the screenings, evaluate the screening program objectives, and represent MDH as a liaison between local boards of education and LHDs.

Contractual Position	1
Salary and Fringe Benefits	\$58,151
Operating Expenses	<u>5,515</u>
Total FY 2019 State Expenditures	\$63,666

Future year expenditures reflect termination of the contractual employee at the end of fiscal 2020.

This estimate does not include any health insurance costs that could be incurred for specified contractual employees under the State’s implementation of the federal Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act.

Local Expenditures: Local government expenditures for both LHDs and school systems increase significantly to expand vision screening, as required under the bill. The Maryland Association of County Health Officers anticipates that every LHD that conducts screenings must hire a new full-time employee for every 3,000 students who must be screened in a given year, and that the statewide local expenditures for these LHDs to hire new staff increase by at least \$4.0 million annually. Similar costs are likely for certain local boards of education that do the screenings. Additionally, local expenditures increase by at least \$500,000 in fiscal 2019 to purchase new equipment capable of screening for additional vision disorders such as anisocoria, astigmatism, and convergence insufficiency; maintenance and replacement costs are likely in the out-years. Local expenditures also increase to train staff to use the new equipment and to prepare and distribute the required notifications. To the extent that staff who currently perform screenings are not qualified

to perform the new screenings, costs for LHDs and local boards of education increase further to contract with qualified professionals to perform them.

Additional Comments: Senate Bill 570 of 2018 is a similar bill.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: None.

Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): Maryland Association of County Health Officers; Carroll, Harford, Montgomery, and Queen Anne's counties; Maryland State Department of Education; Maryland Association of Boards of Education; Maryland Department of Health; Department of Legislative Services

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