

HB 1339 -- VISION EXAMINATIONS FOR CERTAIN STUDENTS

SPONSOR: Wells

COMMITTEE ACTION: Voted "do pass" by the Committee on Health Insurance by a vote of 8 to 1.

This bill removes the June 30, 2012 expiration date of the provisions requiring every child enrolling in kindergarten or first grade in a public school to receive one comprehensive vision examination by a licensed optometrist or physician.

FISCAL NOTE: Estimated Net Cost on General Revenue Fund of \$99,000 in FY 2013, FY 2014, and FY 2015. No impact on Other State Funds in FY 2013, FY 2014, and FY 2015.

PROPOSERS: Supporters say that the vision screenings conducted in the schools are not the same as comprehensive eye exams because visual screenings are not always accurate. Visual learning accounts for 80% of how and what we learn and early detection helps with better success. The pilot project for the last two years shows that one child in every classroom is not properly screened. The bill is not a mandate because the parent or guardian of a child will still be able to opt out of the requirement. Those advocating on behalf of the medical community support provisions that only give primary care to medical doctors that does not include optometrists because optometry does not fall in the scope of primary care medicine.

Testifying for the bill were Representative Wells; Jeff Gamble, Columbia Eye Consultants Optometry; Liz Kostas; Missouri Optometric Association; Missouri Primary Care Association; Tina Bernskoetter, Missouri Head Start Association; Jerry Burch, Missouri Parent Teachers Association; and Thomas F. Greene.

OPPOSERS: Those who oppose the bill say that the bill does not implement the Children's Vision Commission's recommendation that the current requirement that all children have a comprehensive eye exam before entering school be removed. State-wide data collected during the pilot program indicates that there is no significant health benefit to a comprehensive eye exam. Through collaborative efforts, the commission developed a uniform screening protocol which identifies children who might need a follow-up, comprehensive eye exam.

Testifying against the bill were Missouri State Medical Association; Missouri School Boards Association; Tammy Teeling, Missouri Association of School Nurses; Linda Neumann, St. Louis School Nurses Association; Missouri National Education Association; Missouri Academy of Family Physicians; Missouri

Society of Eye Physicians and Surgeons; and Missouri Association of Physicians and Surgeons.

OTHERS: Others testifying on the bill say that the data the pilot project collected was not the type of data necessary to determine the program's impact and effectiveness. The commission did not effectively evaluate the program.

Testifying on the bill was Kayla Crider.