

July 10, 2024

The Honorable Gus Bilirakis
United States House of Representatives
2306 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Marc Veasey
United States House of Representatives
2348 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representatives Bilirakis and Veasey:

The 83 undersigned organizations thank you for your leadership in introducing **H.R. 8400, the Early Detection of Vision Impairments for Children Act of 2024** (EDVI Act). This legislation would improve the vision and eye health of children across the United States by providing resources to states and communities to establish or improve systems of care for children's vision and eye health through early detection and intervention models for vision screening, referrals to eye care, and follow-up to eye care treatment.

Despite the presence of numerous public health programs that support early childhood development, including children's hearing and oral health, there is currently no federally funded program or initiative in the United States that specifically addresses children's vision or that fosters a cohesive and equitable system of eye health for children. According to the [National Center for Children's Vision and Eye Health](#), significant disparities exist in children's vision and eye health outcomes and access to eye care across the United States. State laws to address children's vision vary widely in approaches and often lack protocols for referrals to eye care providers and documentation to ensure eye care was received. States may also lack the necessary resources to adequately capture data on rates of received eye care, leading to challenges in addressing existing disparities among demographic sub-populations or in rural or under-resourced communities.

A child's vision develops and changes from birth through childhood. Because of these changes, a child should be screened regularly, referred to eye care, and receive any needed treatment and follow-up to care to ensure vision problems are caught early and permanent vision loss is avoided. **More than one in every four children in America, or roughly 19.6 million¹, have a vision problem requiring treatment.** If left untreated, common vision disorders in childhood, such as amblyopia (lazy eye), strabismus (crossed eyes), myopia (nearsightedness), or hyperopia (farsightedness), may continue to affect health and well-being throughout the child's life.

The goal of the EDVI Act is to ensure that every child with a possible vision problem is identified and connected to appropriate eye care, to support early childhood professionals,

¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Vision and Eye Health Surveillance System:

[https://ddtvehss.cdc.gov/LP?Level1=Vision+Problems+and+Blindness&Level2=Vision+Loss+and+Blindness&Level3=EHSS+Composite+Prevalence+Estimate:+Visual+Acuity+Loss&Level4=Prevalence+of+Any+Visual+Acuity+Loss+\(%E2%89%A420/32+Best+Corrected\),+by+Detailed+Age+Groups+LocationId=&DataSourceId=PREV&IndicatorId=QVLD%7ERVAN Y&ShowFootnotes=true&View=NationalChart&CompareViewYear=1&CompareId=&CompareId2=&YearId=YR9&ResponseId=RVANY&AgeId=AGE1217&GenderId=GALL&RaceId=ALLR ACE&RiskFactorId=RFPERS&RiskFactorResponseId=RFTOT&DataValueTypeId=CRDPREV&MapClassifierId=quantile&MapClassifierCount=4&CountyFlag=N](https://ddtvehss.cdc.gov/LP?Level1=Vision+Problems+and+Blindness&Level2=Vision+Loss+and+Blindness&Level3=EHSS+Composite+Prevalence+Estimate:+Visual+Acuity+Loss&Level4=Prevalence+of+Any+Visual+Acuity+Loss+(%E2%89%A420/32+Best+Corrected),+by+Detailed+Age+Groups+LocationId=&DataSourceId=PREV&IndicatorId=QVLD%7ERVAN Y&ShowFootnotes=true&View=NationalChart&CompareViewYear=1&CompareId=&CompareId2=&YearId=YR9&ResponseId=RVANY&AgeId=AGE1217&GenderId=GALL&RaceId=ALLR ACE&RiskFactorId=RFPERS&RiskFactorResponseId=RFTOT&DataValueTypeId=CRDPREV&MapClassifierId=quantile&MapClassifierCount=4&CountyFlag=N)

health care providers, and families with updated and evidence-based vision screening methods and established referrals to care, and advance follow-up protocols to ensure that children who need eye care treatment receive it before a vision problem leads to potential vision loss.

The EDVI Act models the bipartisan success of the Early Hearing Detection and Intervention (EHDI) program that has drastically increased the rates of screening and referral to care for infants with hearing loss since 1999. Under the EDVI Act, the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) would award grants and cooperative agreements for states, communities, and tribes issued through a competitive grant process for purposes of:

- Implementing early detection practices (such as vision screenings) and intervention initiatives for the purpose of identifying vision concerns in children, to promote referrals for eye care, and establish follow-up mechanisms to ensure care was received,
- Raising awareness to the public of the importance of vision and eye health in children,
- Reducing disparities in eye health, and/or
- Developing state-based data collection, surveillance, and performance improvement systems.

The EDVI Act also makes resources available through the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to establish a national level technical assistance center to provide guidance to any state or community implementing, updating, or improving children's vision programs, to promote surveillance, and to advance population health research priorities in children's vision. The EDVI Act also encourages collaboration across various agencies under HHS and with the U.S. Department of Education—a key step to ensure that children's vision and eye health resources are broadly addressed to improve academic outcomes.

Children's vision and eye health **must** become a national priority to ensure that children can grow up with the healthiest vision possible and realize their full potential across their lifetime. Passing this important legislation would signify Congress's commitment to preventing avoidable blindness and preserving the sight of our nation's children.

We thank you again for your leadership in introducing this important legislation, and we proudly offer our endorsement. We look forward to working with you to support its passage and enactment.

Sincerely,

Prevent Blindness
Academy for Certification of Vision Rehabilitation & Education Professionals
AccessAbility Officer

American Academy of Ophthalmology
American Academy of Optometry
American Academy of Pediatrics
American Association of Certified Orthoptists
American Association of Pediatric Ophthalmology and Strabismus
American Council of the Blind
American Diabetes Association
American Glaucoma Society
American Optometric Association
American Society of Ophthalmic Registered Nurses
Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired
Association of Clinicians for the Underserved
Association of Maternal & Child Health Programs
The Association for Research in Vision and Ophthalmology
Association of Schools and Colleges of Optometry
Beyond Vision
California Agencies for the Blind and Visually Impaired
The Chicago Lighthouse
Children's Vision Equity Alliance
Children's Vision Massachusetts
Dry Eye Foundation
F.A.C.E.S of AZ
Family Centered Treatment Foundation
Family Voices
First Focus Campaign for Children
Friends for Sight
Future Leaders in Sight
Georgia Council of the Blind
The Glaucoma Foundation
Global Coalition on Aging
Guide Dogs for the Blind
Healthy Schools Campaign
Illinois Society for the Prevention of Blindness
International Eye Foundation
Kansas School Nurses Association
Know the Glow
Lighthouse Central Florida /Lighthouse Works
Lighthouse Guild
Lupus and Allied Diseases Association, Inc.
Miami Lighthouse for the Blind/Florida Heiken Children's Vision Program
National Alliance for Eye and Vision Research
National Association of School Nurses
National Association of Vision Care Plans
National Coalition for Infant Health

National Industries for the Blind
National League for Nursing
National Optometric Association
New England College of Optometry
New York Vision Rehabilitation Association
OneSight EssilorLuxottica Foundation
Optometric Vision Development and Rehabilitation Association
PeekABoo Vision Care Initiative
Pennsylvania Association for the Blind
Pennsylvania Council of the Blind
Perkins School for the Blind
Prevent Blindness Georgia
Prevent Blindness Iowa
Prevent Blindness North Carolina
Prevent Blindness Ohio
Prevent Blindness Texas
Prevent Blindness Wisconsin
Prevention of Blindness Society of Metropolitan Washington
Research to Prevent Blindness
Sampalis Eye Care
School-Based Health Alliance
Seva Foundation
Sight Savers America
Society for Public Health Education
Spectrios Institute
Sutter Medical Group
TED Community Organization
University of Houston College of Optometry
University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health
UW Health Kids
Vision Health Advocacy Coalition
The Vision Council
Vision Forward Association
Vitalyst Health Foundation
VOSH/California
VOSH/International
Wayfinder Family Services
3rd Eye View