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MA Joint Committee on Public Health

Public Hearing 5.3.2021

On behalf of the Massachusetts School Nurse Organization (MSNO), a professional group of 800 MA school nurses, I am pleased to describe why the members of the Joint Committee on Public Health should move the Postural Screening Bill (SB1401, filed by Sen Julian Cyr and HB2335, filed by Rep Kay Khan) out of this committee. This is the 3rd time MSNO is filing the postural screening bill. During the last two legislative cycles, this bill moved out of the Joint Committee on Public Health and one has spoken against this bill. Last year, the bill died in Health Care Financing as did other bills due to COVID.

Currently Massachusetts General Law Part 1, Title 12, Chapter 71, Section 57 states that, "Tests ascertaining postural defects shall be administered at least once annually in grades five through nine." This law was passed more than 40 years ago when many students did not have insurance and/or access to a pediatrician. Currently, most students have a medical home and are screened by their primary care provider.

In this bill we are asking to decrease the state mandate of postural screening from the current requirement to screen all students annually in grades 5 through 9 to once annually for students in one grade (grade 6, 7, 8, or 9).

School nurses and/or physical education teachers are trained to visually inspecting a student's back from the front, side, and back while the student stands up straight and while they perform a forward-bending motion. The screening is done with the shirt off for boys. Girls are asked to wear their bra or a bathing suit. Often the screening is performed behind a screen in the gym during PE or in the health office along with other screenings, such as vision, health, and confidential substance use interview screening. It takes 1-2 minutes per student to conduct the screening, and it can take the Nurse and PE teacher a full class period to screen a full class of students. Unless a student needs assessment and treatment by the School Nurse due to injury or rash, there is no other reason for a student to remove his or her shirt while in school. . . . except for postural screening.

We support this legislation to reduce postural screening frequency in schools because:

- Routine postural screening is not recommended by the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force,*
- Critical time on learning is lost over 5 grades,
- Many parents/guardians opt-out each year (school nurses report up to 60% opting out of the screening)
- Primary Care Pediatric Providers perform postural screening as part of the physical exam,
- School Nurse time is better used for other screenings, such as the universal SBIRT substance use screening in two grades as required by the 2016 STEP Act, and
- 93-97% of MSNO members polled in December 2018 (42% of all members, 365 school nurses) support filing this postural screening legislation.

There are only 7 states, including Massachusetts, that require Postural Screening by law.

The following quotes were provided by school nurses responding to MSNO's outreach to MA school nurses about their experience with postural screening:

"With the ACA, families have access to regular pediatric care for their children, which includes an annual postural screen. This screening belongs in the pediatrician's office."

"With the advent of annual exams and preventative care at the primary health provider there has been less and less uncaught or undiagnosed curvatures. Also in my experience there has been a marked increase in resistance to this screening at school. It is perceived as an invasion of privacy. Many parents are opting their children out of this screening."

"In 18 years of school nursing I have only known of 1 student who was diagnosed after a screening with Scoliosis. The student was due to see the primary care physician within a few months so it was only discovered about 6 weeks before the annual physical exam with her provider. More often than not when a nurse has a concern the student or parent states that the student is being followed already by the physician."

"I strongly support this legislature- 98% of our students are screened by their PCP and we have had negligible referrals for students for follow up and 0 who have had any intervention . At my high school almost half of the student population REFUSE screening for posture."

For more information, please contact:

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*<https://www.uspreventiveservicestaskforce.org/Page/Document/RecommendationStatementFinal/adolescent-idiopathic-scoliosis-screening1>