



CVMA Advocacy Talking Points

These talking points are a guide only. ***The most important points you can provide in a meeting with a legislator or their staff come from your personal stories*** - your experience of a childhood vision problem, or as a parent of a child with one, the work you do, or other reasons you are involved or interested in supporting best vision for all Massachusetts children.

Members can be potential champions for children's vision and eye health, especially if they have a record of working on health, education, or children's issues. As their constituent, you are their eyes on the ground. This is your time to **tell them what they should know and why they should want to help!**

Conversation Starters

Introduce yourself: [What brings you here, where you live.](#) A great way to make a personal connection with a staffer or Member is to ask where they are from.

Explain why children's vision is important to you. How have you been impacted? Educate the Member or staff about what you know. **Tell your story!**

How can the Representative/Senator help you? You are here to discuss the fundamental importance of healthy vision for children as they grow. It is a priority for kids. We are asking for the support of the Representative or Senator's for the bills H2231 (for a state Representative) or S136 (for a state Senator).

Conversation Finishers

[Does the Member have questions?](#)

[How is the member positioned on childhood vision?](#)

[Would the Representative/Senator have any interest in working with us to improve children's vision and eye health?](#)

[What resources or information would be most helpful to them in following up?](#)

Thank them for their time.

Please tell us you've spoken to your legislator or their staff! We'd love to hear feedback from your conversation. You are welcome to copy Paulette Tattersall, Co-Chair, on email communications: ptattersall@preventblindness.org, or reach out with any questions. Thank you!

The remainder of this document is background information. Please use as needed.

A brief legislative history of children's vision advocacy in Massachusetts:

A more detailed legislative history is here: <https://childrensvision.preventblindness.org/cvma-advocacy/>

1. 2004 - Massachusetts led the nation in passing legislation (Ch 181 of the Acts of 2004, an Act Relative to Eye Examination for Children) to create a mechanism to identify children entering Kindergarten with a vision problem and direct them to treatment. **This law was an important first step in identification of childhood vision disorders.**
Read it here: <https://malegislature.gov/Laws/GeneralLaws/PartI/TitleXII/Chapter71/Section57>
2. 2017 - CVMA supported legislation for **the establishment of a Special Commission on Children's Vision and Eye Health** (sponsored by Rep. Barber) to study and report on the current status of children's vision and eye health in the state. **After 13 years, significant gaps in vision care still remained for MA children** despite most insurances including Mass Health, covering children's eye exams at no charge. In 2021, we still await the Special Commission recommendations.



3. **2021-22- The next step: Enactment of H2231 or S136** to build a robust statewide system of surveillance of children's vision and eye health guided by multi-stakeholder Advisory Council.

Reasons: Massachusetts cannot evaluate the success of the 2004 legislation as we have no vision data-collection or accountability at the state level. Our system lacks:

- A reporting requirement for children's vision screening
- A method to determine whether universal vision screening has been accomplished
- A system to ensure referrals to comprehensive eye exams are completed
- A patient-specific system to support on-going care management
- Any data to inform allocation of resources for child population health

Why does H2231/S136 matter?

Systems to monitor vision screening and ensure timely receipt of eye exams and follow-up eye care are important public health measures. Without a uniform method to track these outcomes Massachusetts has no way to measure progress, or cost-effectively and efficiently apply resources and interventions where they are needed. This lack of an accountable state-wide system *reinforces inequities* in access to care that already exist, especially for families living in underserved areas. Untreated vision problems negatively affect nearly every aspect of childhood. By ignoring this investment, these children can fall behind their better-sighted, or visually-corrected peers:

Why support preschool vision screening? Currently children attending private school are exempt from screening and not all public preschoolers are screened. Treatment outcomes can improve if begun when the child is younger. Additionally, not all children regularly access primary healthcare where a vision screening would occur as a part of well-child care. Vision screenings in an educational, childcare, or community health setting may be the only avenue for some children to receive a preventive screening.

The CDC describe untreated vision disorders in U.S. children "*the most prevalent, disabling condition of childhood*". Healthy vision affects physical and cognitive growth, social connection, learning, and play, and ultimately affects adult independence and productivity. Over 250,000 Massachusetts children need vision treatment. Too many live every day with less than healthy or untreated eyesight.

Childhood vision problems are silent. Young children with a vision condition rarely report blurry vision as they may have never known clear vision. Signs and symptoms of a childhood vision deficit are subtle, and can be mistaken for other cognitive or educational issues. More patient/parent education is needed

Disparities exist in the prevalence of childhood vision problems. The only set of Massachusetts data - a 2018-19 National Survey of Child Health Parent survey (NSCH) – shows Massachusetts children were *less likely* to have received a vision screening if their family:

- maintained an annual household income below the federal poverty level
- was non-English speaking
- was of ethnic minority

Currently there are no reliable efforts to support improvement of these vision and eye health inequities.

Research shows a child's visual ability can influence the acquisition of early literacy skills, and affect academic performance. Children with untreated vision problems face unnecessary learning challenges through school. Visual functioning is a strong predictor of academic performance in school children.



Most childhood vision problems respond to treatment but early detection is critical. Over 2000 Massachusetts children, *every year*, will develop amblyopia that, untreated, can lead to lifelong adult vision loss. This vision loss is preventable, treatable and vision loss is totally unnecessary.

Vision loss often comes at a significant cost to the patient and the state's healthcare system. Yet, vision and eye health remain on the margins of healthcare conversations around cost, access, and equity. It is estimated an investment in vision screening will save \$162 for every dollar spent. The highest cost-benefit is for children ages 3 and 4 years of age.

About Children's Vision Massachusetts Coalition:

- CVMA is a volunteer coalition of 70 parents, stakeholder organizations, educators, nurses, pediatricians, eye doctors, and public health advocates committed to assuring that all children have the opportunity to develop their best possible vision.
- Our mission is to build a statewide, systematic approach to vision care for children that is universal, comprehensive, cost effective, collaborative, multidisciplinary, dynamic, sustainable and evidence-based.
- Originally funded by the Maternal and Child Health Bureau, since 2010 CVMA has determined there are **significant gaps in access, education, awareness, communication** in the Massachusetts system of vision care. CVMA is dedicated to improving the lives of all Massachusetts children by
 - **supporting and advocating for public health policies** and systems that improve access to vision and eye health services and **ensure vision health equity** for all Massachusetts children
 - **working to define and analyze access** to comprehensive vision services for children across Massachusetts
 - **encouraging and devises best practices** through vision research
 - **assisting with systems improvement in vision services** across medical homes, state agencies and school districts
 - **raising awareness of the impact of untreated childhood vision disorders** through social media, website, and affiliated blogs and newsletters and provides free, downloadable parent resources in many languages
 - **providing professional resources and training** to preschool and school educators school nurses, and state agency staff such as Early Intervention providers
 - **providing vision screening training and support** in evidence-based screening methods

CVMA Website links:

"About CVMA" brochure

<https://childrensvision.preventblindness.org/wpcontent/uploads/sites/20/2020/05/VISION-AND-LEARNING.pdf>

CVMA Coalition Partners: <https://childrensvision.preventblindness.org/cvma-coalition-members/>

Downloadable parent/professional resources and programs

<https://childrensvision.preventblindness.org/downloadable-cvma-resources-2-2/>

Public Service Announcement: Ask About Vision: video:

<https://childrensvision.preventblindness.org/ask-about-vision-video/>