

American Academy of Pediatrics



DEDICATED TO THE HEALTH OF ALL CHILDREN™

The Massachusetts Chapter

The Honorable Brian S. Dempsey
Chair, House Ways and Means
The State House, Room 243
Boston, MA 02133

RE: Conference Committee on Substance Use, Treatment, Education and Prevention, H. 3947 and S. 2022

Dear Chairman Dempsey,

I write on behalf of the Massachusetts Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics (MCAAP) which represents approximately 1,800 pediatricians across the Commonwealth to urge the conference committee to adopt the Senate language in S.2022 requiring public schools to add screening for substance abuse to the list of health screening already performed.

The members of the MCAAP are physicians dedicated to improving the quality of life for children by providing quality health care and advocating for them and their families. The MCAAP is committed to the attainment of optimal physical, mental and social health for all infants, children, adolescents, and young adults.

Drug and alcohol use are each strongly associated with the leading causes of morbidity and mortality in adolescents; i.e., motor vehicle and other accidents, suicide and homicide (National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, 2014). Teens who use drugs and alcohol before age 15 are four times more likely to develop an addiction than those who began using at age 21 or older.¹

Many pediatricians in Massachusetts have been using the SBIRT tool (Screening, Brief Intervention, and Referral for Treatment) as part of routine care of adolescents. This innovative tool allows for screening of teens to identify each individual's experience on the continuum of substance abuse (for example, from none to severe substance abuse disorders) in order to administer an appropriate clinical intervention and prevent or reduce substance abuse.

As applied to schools through S. 2022, the screening would be developed by DPH. It would be evidence-based questionnaires given in a private setting. It would be confidential and would allow for caring intervention if a problem exists. The student or parent can opt-out of the screening.

A recent research study suggests that SBIRT screening can decrease the number of youth who initiate substance abuse and increase quit rates among those who have just begun.² Initiating substance abuse screening in schools will help address the scourge of substance abuse by allowing health intervention and support during the formative and challenging teenager years.

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¹ MSPCC

² Harris et al Computer-facilitated substance use screening and brief advice for teens in primary care (2012) Pediatrics, 129(6), 1072-1082

The MCAAP urges you to adopt the public school substance abuse screening language contained in S.2022.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael L. McManus". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping initial "M".

Michael L. McManus, MD, MPH, FAAP
President, the Massachusetts Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics