



Montgomery County

Office of Intergovernmental Relations

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HB 1

DATE: February 19, 2020

SPONSOR: The Speaker and Delegate McIntosh, et al.

ASSIGNED TO: Budget and Taxation

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POSITION: SUPPORT

Built to Learn Act of 2020

House Bill 1, the “Built to Learn Act of 2020”, will allow for an accelerated build out of public school construction in the State – something that has been sought after for many years, and could now become a reality. Specifically, the bill:

- authorizes the Maryland Stadium Authority to issue \$2.2 billion in bonds for public school construction, to be allocated, matched, and managed as prescribed under the bill, with up to \$125 million a year dedicated from the Education Trust Fund to pay the debt service on the bonds;
- outlines the process by which Prince George’s County may access bond proceeds made available through the bill if it enters into a P3 agreement to build public schools in the County;
- revises funding for the Enrollment Growth and Relocatable Classrooms program and the Healthy School Facility Fund; and
- creates a new School Facilities Priority Fund to address facility needs of “the highest priority schools in the State as identified by the Statewide Facilities Assessment completed by the Interagency Commission on School Construction.”

Montgomery County strongly supports this proposal. It will make a meaningful difference in addressing the huge backlogs of public school construction projects that exist in Montgomery County and elsewhere in the State.

With an enrollment of 166,300 this year, Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) is the State’s largest school system. Over the past ten years, enrollment has grown by 24,000 students. In fact, for the 19/20 school year, enrollment jumped by 3,600 over the previous year. No other school system in the State has experienced this kind of enrollment growth. There are now 207 schools in the system, with over 150 different languages spoken in the

schools. Currently, MCPS is the 14th largest school system in the United States and based on enrollment projections, is fast approaching the size of the Fairfax County school system – the largest in the Washington suburbs.

While Montgomery County is very appreciative of the assistance the State has provided over the years, the County has struggled mightily to keep up with the pace of the need, now estimated at \$1.8 billion to address capacity issues and aging infrastructure. Already, Montgomery County is supporting nearly 80% of the costs of school construction projects in the County, which is placing unsustainable pressure on the County's finances.

Built to Learn would allow Montgomery County to “jumpstart” a larger capacity building program that would not address all the need but would make significant inroads. Similar to the legislation passed in 2013 for Baltimore City schools, implementing this type of a program would create the opportunity for Montgomery County to leverage State funds to help underwrite the costs of projects aimed at providing additional classrooms at severely overcrowded schools. Similar to the situation in Baltimore City, the need for a substantial investment to blunt the fallout is now.

MCPS is a national leader in public school education and plays a large role in Maryland's position in state rankings of quality school systems. Montgomery County is a primary driver of the economic growth in the State, with the I-270 corridor representing nearly 23% of the State's total payroll employment.

While Montgomery County has the ability to manage many problems on its own, it needs the State as a partner to help invest in the County's infrastructure. Year in and year out, the County's State priorities have reflected this request of the State. Like transportation, there are tipping points, which the County believes it is approaching with its school capacity problem.

If we are to remain competitive, the State must help the County invest in classrooms to prepare the County's and the State's future workforce. Therefore, Montgomery County thanks the leadership of the General Assembly for considering this initiative last year and prioritizing its passage this year. It offers an extraordinary opportunity to make a real difference.