



THE HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE

February 7, 2023 at 1 pm

Chair: Delegate Benjamin Barnes

Vice-Chair: Delegate Mark Chang

HB366: The Maryland School for the Blind Public School Construction Program Eligibility

Good afternoon, Chairman Barnes and members of the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today regarding The Maryland School for the Blind's request to extend eligibility in the Public School Construction Program beyond 2028 and answer your questions.

Key Points

There are three points I want to impart to the Committee:

- MSB's campus has been transformed through its inclusion in IAC funding over the past decade. MSB could not have made this much progress without State support.
- MSB cannot complete its campus master plan before 2028.
- Without continued IAC support, MSB cannot afford to properly steward Maryland's investment in its new buildings and the campus would eventually fall into disrepair.

The Maryland School for the Blind (MSB) Overview

MSB is a unique organization. Established as a private non-profit entity in 1853, this state-funded school supports more than 1,300 blind and low vision students throughout Maryland.

MSB enables Maryland to fulfill two federal mandates established in the Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act (IDEA.) These include providing special education services in public schools and specialized dedicated schools.

MSB dispatches teachers to instruct students in local schools throughout the State and maintains a campus-based specialized school program. Additionally, MSB hosts summer and weekend educational enrichment programs and houses the State braille textbook lending library, which sources and distributes costly braille textbooks to all Maryland counties.

The MSB campus predates IDEA and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). As a result, the buildings were not designed according to today's standards and were unsuitable for MSB's current enrollment, predominantly made up of blind students with complex learning and physical needs.

Inclusion in the Public School Construction Program (PSCP)/Interagency Commission (IAC) on School Construction

In April 2012, the passage of HB1391 authorized MSB to acquire school construction funding. The legislation was time-limited, sunseting in 2028.

Since then, MSB has executed approximately three-fourths of its campus master plan. The new buildings are modern, energy efficient and accessible for the students and staff.

However, the campus master plan is incomplete. House Bill 366 would allow MSB to remain eligible for the critical funding needed to complete the rest of its campus master plan executed after 2028.

Equally important, this bill allows MSB to properly maintain its new buildings in the stewardship of Maryland's significant investment in the school campus since the passage of HB1391 in 2012.

There are two current construction projects: a dorm/State braille book repository to be completed in FY24 and a pool tentatively scheduled for FY26.

All projects conform to the conditions and oversight of the IAC before MSB commits to construction.

Additional construction projects remain to be completed after FY28, and there will be ongoing maintenance expenditures. Some of these include:

Campus Construction

- Entrance Safety and Security Reconfiguration \$1.3M
(Visitor registration. Mitigating the risk of intruders and active shooters.)
- New Gym \$14.7M
- New Vocational and Agricultural learning center \$11.5M

Maintenance

- Student Housing \$320K
(Renew the roof, facade, fixtures, and finishes)

(All figures are in today's dollars and are from the campus master plan update cost estimates completed in December 2022.)

Without this legislation, MSB would be ineligible for construction funding after 2028 and would not have the resources to complete the campus master plan. Parts of the campus would not achieve current accessibility requirements, and MSB would not be able to realize Maryland's vocational education programming standards.

As MSB's new buildings depreciate, there will be ongoing maintenance needs that IAC funding supports. These include roofs and mechanical systems such as plumbing, electrical, HVAC, ventilation, elevators, and boilers.

Without this legislation, MSB's campus would eventually deteriorate.

This bill would ensure that the State's significant capital investment in MSB is safeguarded and that the buildings are maintained in a safe and functional condition for the students and staff.

MSB cannot leverage local tax revenue to fund school construction and improvements, unlike county public schools. Moreover, it does not have the donor or endowment resources to fund an extensive campus master plan or ongoing maintenance. (However, MSB's fundraising allows it to raise the cost-share for construction.)

House Bill 366 would allow MSB to continue construction after 2028, which would have a positive impact on the local economy by employing local architecture firms, construction companies, sub-contractors, and supporting jobs, generating income for local businesses.

For these reasons, MSB requests your support for the passage of HB366.

The Maryland School for the Blind, its board, staff, and students sincerely appreciate your consideration.

Sincerely,



W. Robert Hair
Superintendent-CEO