



February 20, 2024

Dear Maryland State Senate Budget and Tax Committee,

Please accept this letter in support of SB0892 [School Construction - Public Charter School Facility Fund - Establishment](#) sponsored by Senator McCray. As a member of the Senate Budget and Tax Committee, this bill will be before you on February 21, 2024.

[Afya Baltimore Inc. \(ABI\)](#) is a nonprofit organization responsible for managing public charter schools in Baltimore City. Afya is a Swahili word for health, and health and wellness are at the heart of all that we do. ABI provides the foundational and operational support necessary for our schools to do the work of helping Baltimore's children to live healthy, balanced lives: intellectually, socially/emotionally, and physically.

ABI operates two schools across three facilities - The Tunbridge School (Elementary and Middle School at the York Rd. Campus) and The Belair-Edison School (Elementary School at the Brehms Ln. Campus and Middle School at the Brendan Ave. Campus). Two of these facilities are in historical former parochial school buildings which we own. The third facility is in a Baltimore City Public School System (BCPSS) owned building which we lease. We pay utilities only and are responsible for all other repairs and maintenance on the property, including significant capital investment.

The two operator-owned buildings were in great disrepair when we purchased them in 2007 and 2010, as they had been pretty much abandoned for years prior as the Catholic schools went out of business. Our district-owned building was in poor condition as well when we began leasing it in 2016. At that time, and every year since, we have invested in our buildings. From our per pupil funding, we pay for:

- debt service on two of our buildings, and rent on the third
- capital improvements each summer - both as a requirement of our loans and for the high standards we hold for our school communities
- utilities - with outdated HVAC, drafty buildings that are not energy efficient
- facility and cleaning staff to cover 159,000 square feet across three campuses
- security - comprehensive security systems including cameras and monitoring systems
- insurance - comprehensive property and liability insurance
- landscaping - annual upkeep across five acres of grounds, including planting, forestry work, and mulching
- regular upkeep and repairs on everything from signage to graffiti removal to lighting

On average in our schools, we spend 10% of our per pupil allocation on these things. Much of the money we spend ON these facilities could be spent IN our classrooms, with the passage of SB0892.



SB0892 is a smart piece of legislation that aligns well with the mission of charter schools— the reimbursable funds are managed by the Interagency Commission on School Construction (IAC), allowing for accountability and transparency with Maryland State’s General Fund money, and holding public charter schools to a high standard with autonomy to make decisions that work best for their school communities. This funding does not impact the Blueprint formula or take funding away from any other public school students. Instead, SB0892 will allow more Blueprint dollars to be spent IN the classroom on learning instead of ON the school's facility.

Charter school students are public school students; charter school staff are union employees — they deserve to be in 21st century buildings as much as their colleagues and classmates in traditional buildings do. Families and teachers that choose to be in a charter school - a choice which is their right to make according to Maryland State Law - should not have to be in older buildings that are more in need of repair.

We hope you will support the more than 24,000 students, across 53 schools in eight districts in Maryland with the passage of SB0892. I am happy to discuss this bill and the positive impact it will have on our schools any time.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Will McKenna".

Will McKenna  
Founder and Executive Director  
Afya Baltimore Inc. (ABI)  
[wmckenna@afyabaltimore.org](mailto:wmckenna@afyabaltimore.org)  
410-736-8980



February 20, 2024

Dear Maryland State Senate Budget and Tax Committee:

Please accept this letter in support of SB0892: School Construction - Public Charter Schools Facility Fund - Establishment.

Craig Gaulden Davis has been working with Afya Baltimore Inc. (ABI) since 2019, providing comprehensive architectural services and assisting ABI with strategic planning related to its facilities.

We have worked extensively on two of the three ABI facilities, The Tunbridge School and The Belair-Edison School | Brendan Campus, which are in historical former parochial school buildings. We also work on school buildings around Baltimore and around the state so we are quite familiar with all aspects of facility enhancement and maintenance.

ABI has a 10-year commitment to facility upgrades - it's of utmost importance to keep these buildings in great shape while updating for 21st century learning and the challenges of this with limited resources are many.

Per pupil reimbursable funds from the successful passage of SB0892, which will pay for things like debt service, utilities, cleaning crews, safety/security, insurance, landscaping, regular repairs and maintenance, allows more money to be allocated to the children and the classrooms. Saved funding also allows allocation of funds to the capital expenses/architectural upgrades/renovations so desperately needed in these old buildings. For this reason we ask the Maryland State Senate Budget & Tax Committee to support SB0892: School Construction - Public Charter Schools Facility Fund - Establishment, which will provide equitable funding for the 52 public charter schools and 24,000+ students who attend them in Maryland.

Sincerely,

CRAIG GAULDEN DAVIS, INC.

James H. Determan, FAIA  
Principal



2116 Holder Ave,  
Suite 100  
Baltimore, MD 21207

2/20/2024

Dear Maryland State Senate Budget and Tax Committee,

Please accept this letter in support of SB0892: School Construction - Public Charter Schools Facility Fund - Establishment. Communication Systems Design has been working with Afya Baltimore Inc. (ABI) since 2008, providing comprehensive IT services and products to their three facilities - The Tunbridge School, The Belair-Edison School | Brehms Campus and The Belair-Edison School | Brendan Campus - in the areas of computer hardware, security cameras and surveillance, and internet access.

ABI has a high standard for the equipment students' use, commitment to upgrading and maintaining hardware, and using the latest technology to ensure its schools are safe for students and staff alike. This commitment takes an extraordinary financial investment on an annual basis, for which ABI's current funding source almost exclusively comes from its per pupil allocation. Facilities funding for all public charter schools, including ABI's, would be incredibly helpful.

We ask the Maryland State Senate Budget & Tax Committee to support SB0892: School Construction - Public Charter Schools Facility Fund - Establishment, which will provide equitable funding for the 52 public charter schools and more than 24,000 kids who attend them in Maryland.

Sincerely,

Troy W. Stokes Sr, CLVES

*Troy W. Stokes, Sr*

Troy W. Stokes  
Project Manager  
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In 2019 we researched the history of our three buildings and wrote a series of blog posts about them. Simply put: We love our schools. These buildings in Govans and Belair-Edison are filled with history and we've filled them with the hopes and joys of the present and future. We invest in their daily maintenance keeping them shiny and clean, safe and secure, both inside and outside, and try our very best to make important capital improvements annually. **Facilities funding support from Maryland will help us continue our work in these beautiful old buildings and make our teaching and learning and gathering even better as per pupil dollars can stay IN the classroom where they belong.**

— Will McKenna, Founder and Executive Director | Afya Baltimore Inc. (ABI)

See the series of blog posts on our website at [www.afyabaltimore.org/contact/blog](http://www.afyabaltimore.org/contact/blog)

## These Old Buildings | Introduction

Posted March 25, 2019

I went to [St. John Catholic School](#), in Westminster, MD, from first through fifth grade. I wasn't a very curious student. The most vivid memories I have of my education during that time include running from the nuns, playing tackle ball at recess, and being asked by Sister Sarah, after getting caught spit-balling in the back of the classroom, if I was prepared, at the early age of 10, to die.

It is the gym at St. John's that I remember most. I was at home in the gym, where I played basketball for hours on end. The gym was cramped—a shot from one end to the other would be well within Steph Curry's range—but echoed with cheer and character.



Two of the three schools which Afya Baltimore Inc. (ABI) operates are located in former Catholic school buildings. [Afya Public Charter School](#) (opened 2008) is located in the old [Shrine of the Little Flower School](#) in Belair-Edison. [Tunbridge Public Charter School's](#) building (opened 2010) was once the home of the [St. Mary of the Assumption School](#) in Govans. Both of these schools have long and beautiful histories, much like St. John's. Our third school, [Brehms Lane Public Charter School](#) (opened 2016), is in a City Schools' owned building, also in Belair-Edison, and has an interesting history of its own.

As we renovate and take care of these old buildings, we aim to amplify our mission and infuse our vision of the work. We want to make these school buildings— which include gymnasiums, chapels turned into science labs, old oak church pews, stained glass windows, stonework that was quarried and laid by master craftsmen, bomb shelters, cupolas, spiral staircases, and secret spaces— our very own. We also try to respect our past, the history of our old buildings, and the people who lived and worked and played in them before our time. For a detailed history of these special places, visit the lobby in each of our facilities, and see for yourself the rich history we wish to preserve.

In the coming weeks and months, we will be releasing a series of blog posts to honor the histories of our three buildings. Enjoy.



## These Old Buildings | 2800 Brendan Ave.

Posted March 27, 2019

*A Series of Stories About the School Buildings in Which We Live, Work, and Play*

### *Introduction*

Afya opened its doors for the first time in August 2008 with support from the [Abell Foundation](#) and the [Reinvestment Fund](#). The first class that year had 115 students. Eighty-one years earlier, another school started its first year in this same spot, The Shrine of the Little Flower School. On September 14, 1927, The Shrine started with 227 students and had 12 rooms for students and staff. The church, of the same name, was located in the basement of the property, and its entrance faced north, towards Kentucky Avenue.



Over the years, The Shrine's parish grew dramatically. In 1946, a convent for the nuns was built. In 1951, a new church was constructed. In 1956, the Shrine added two additional wings to the building. At its peak, enrollment at the Shrine's school reached 1,700 students. As reported by Paul McMullen, in his [article](#) about Shrine's history, "Greg Malanowski, 61, was a second-grader that year [1959-69]. 'There were 80 kids in my first-grade classroom, and there were two other first-grade classes,' said Malanowski. The Scout troop was so large, half of us met on Monday, the other half on Friday, at the hut in Herring Run Park."

The Shrine thrived for many decades and then, as Baltimore's population began to decline in the 1980s and 90s, struggled to survive. Eventually, in 2005, the school closed.

The old church is now Afya's cafeteria. The convent is now the [Green School of Baltimore](#). Afya has been operating for more than a decade, and in August of 2018, the Baltimore City Board of School Commissioners voted to merge Afya with Brehms Lane, to create a dual facility pre-k through eighth grade school.

The future of the Brendan Ave. property is changing all the time. Still, in a single place, a single space, the old and the new, the past and the future, mingle as one.

## These Old Buildings | 3536 Brehms Ln.

Posted April 1, 2019

*A Series of Stories About the School Buildings in Which We Live, Work, and Play*

*Introduction*

*2800 Brendan Ave.*

*5504 York Rd.*



Belair, or “Belle Aire” as it was known back in 1735, has a rich history in our city. The community originated through a land grant which was issued to Daniel Scott in 1731 and was home to a mere 200 residents around the mid 1800s. Now, with a bolstering population of over 30,000 in the combined Belair-Edison community, it is home to Brehms Lane Public Charter School. Before it became a school for our children, Brehms Lane was in a large area owned by three of the most prominent men at the time in Baltimore: George Brehm, George Lamley, and George Erdman. Not surprisingly, the area became known as Georgetown, with George Brehm owning some 624 acres. Brehm also owned many breweries in the area and underground tunnels have been found where the brewery stored its ales.

The community started to grow in the 1920s and '30s and by the 1940s, when the neighborhood Belair-Edison was officially established, there were more than 1,700 dwellings in the area. This was around the same time that enrollment at The Shrine of the Little Flower (now Afya Public Charter School) began to boom. In 1936, Brehms Lane Elementary School opened its doors. In 1992, Brehms Lane underwent renovations, allowing for new opportunities for students. In 2015 (2016?), Afya Baltimore Inc. (ABI) converted Brehms Lane to a neighborhood public charter school and additional renovations have occurred, including the construction of new bathrooms, repainting, landscaping and newly built play area, and a host of other work to enhance the learning experience for students and families alike.

## These Old Buildings | 5504 York Rd.

Posted April 1, 2019

*A Series of Stories About the School Buildings in Which We Live, Work, and Play*

*Introduction*

*2800 Brendan Ave.*



Tunbridge opened in the fall of 2010 for students in Pre-K to 3rd grade. St. Mary of the Assumption's roots in the Govans neighborhood of Baltimore City go much deeper. The [church](#) itself opened in 1850 as the only church in North Baltimore at the time. In

September of 1874, the parish opened St. Mary of the Assumption School located on Homeland Ave., which was run by the School Sisters of Notre Dame. This Catholic school flourished for over a century. As enrollments continued to climb in the early 1900s, the school needed more space. In the fall of 1952, a new school building and convent were completed at what is now 5504 York Rd. These buildings sit just north of the St. Mary of the Assumption church and rectory.

St. Mary of the Assumption School continued to thrive for many years in its new space. After 135 years of educating children, St. Mary of the Assumption School closed its doors in May of 2009 due to declining enrollment. Ms. Phelan, the principle of St. Mary of the Assumption School at the time of the closure is quoted in the [Archdiocese of Baltimore Catholic Review](#) as saying, "God closes one door, and opens windows."

Tunbridge opened its doors— and windows— for the first time to about 200 students on August 30, 2010, after renovating the main office and cafeteria, and branding the building in orange, yellow, and green. The school added a grade each year until we became fully grown to 8th grade. In 2014, Tunbridge renovated the convent, converting this residence into classrooms, community space, and a fitness room for our middle schoolers. Thus, in a single place, a single space, the old and the new, the past and the future, mingle as one.