



CHESAPEAKE LIGHTHOUSE FOUNDATION

Lighting The Way For Excellence in Education!

6151 Chevy Chase Drive Laurel, MD 20707 P: (301) 776-2300 F: (240) 547-2571



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Written Testimony for SB0892

As the Chief Financial Officer of the Chesapeake Lighthouse Foundation (CLF), a role I have proudly held since 2011, I have had the privilege of overseeing our organization's financial operations through periods of significant growth and development. My journey with CLF, from Director of Purchasing to Business Manager and now CFO, has given me a firsthand perspective on the financial challenges and opportunities facing public charter schools in Maryland. With an educational background in Economics, Business Administration, and Education, and as I prepare for the CPA exam, I am fully committed to the fiscal health and strategic development of our schools.

Today, I write to express our enthusiastic support for Senate Bill 0892 (SB0892), legislation that represents a critical step forward in addressing the long-standing inequities in capital funding for facilities between public charter schools and Local Education Agencies (LEAs). This bill proposes a practical and equitable solution by establishing a fund managed by the Interagency Commission on School Construction (IAC), allowing public charter schools to apply for up to \$2,000 per pupil annually for eligible facilities-related expenses.

The importance of this legislation cannot be overstated. Currently, LEAs have access to capital funding and general funds from various sources to support their facilities, operations, and maintenance—resources not available to public charter schools. This discrepancy forces charter schools to divert substantial amounts of funding from educational programs to cover facilities costs. SB0892 offers a pathway to redirect these funds back to where they belong: directly supporting the educational experiences of our students.

Our commitment to providing a world-class education is often hampered by the limitations of our physical infrastructure. The reality is that many of our schools operate in buildings that are older, in need of repair, or not fully suited to the innovative educational programs we wish to offer. This not only affects the learning environment but also places unnecessary stress on our dedicated teachers and limits the educational opportunities available to our students.

SB0892 addresses these challenges head-on without impacting the Blueprint formula or taking funding away from other public school students. The bill ensures that state general funds are allocated in a way that enhances the educational infrastructure for charter schools, thereby leveling the playing field for all public school students in Maryland. Furthermore, it establishes strong parameters around spending accountability and transparency, ensuring that investments in our facilities are made with the utmost integrity and foresight.

The Chesapeake Lighthouse Foundation, along with the larger charter school community in Maryland, which includes more than 24,000 families and 53 schools across eight districts, stands united in support of SB0892. We believe that all students, regardless of the type of public school they attend, deserve to be educated in safe, welcoming, and adequately equipped school buildings.

Sincerely,

Vedat Dogan

Chief Financial Officer- Chesapeake Lighthouse Foundation