

I am Savona Rizzo, a current 9th grader in the International Baccalaureate (IB) program in Frederick County. Last year, I came to testify for SB0646, a bill practically identical to the current bill, SB0892. I was even told I was the best testifier the committee had heard so far that day! I came as an 8th grader from Frederick Classical Charter School (FCCS) and I had many friends with me from charter schools in Frederick County. We were representing more than 24,000 public charter school students in 53 public charter schools across the state who did not get their needs filled when the bill was not passed last year. I am here to reiterate what I said before, and I sincerely hope that the Senate Committee will see and fulfill the needs of this community.

Please watch my testimony from March 7, 2023, for SB0646 (Starting at 1:12:00):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=jA-VgiKpTbY&list=PL7b1g7sUFsqjnBbKbpobr-qJEclhmtllz&index=23>

Maryland charter schools have gone over 20 years without any public funding to pay for our school buildings. Per Pupil Allocation (PPA) *does* in fact provide operational funding which *is* commensurate with our peers. Unfortunately, charter schools do not get to spend all of this money on student learning; we have to pay rent. My past school's building (between rent and facility management) costs about \$730,000 every year, or about 17% of their PPA. My sister's school, Monocacy Valley Montessori Public Charter School (MVMPCS), recently bought and renovated a building. Their previous building was a century-old church that was constantly having severe facility issues, sometimes so bad that they had to cancel school. Their new building cost them a total of around \$16 million dollars (buying and renovations), which is almost \$30 million dollars less than building a new public neighborhood elementary school. Passing this bill would mean they, as well as all other charter schools suffering the same issue, can immediately hire the staff members they need as well as fix and/or improve their buildings. In the future, charter schools in Maryland may have a chance to have real school buildings, with outdoor green spaces, maybe with nice cafeterias and regular gyms and science labs and working heating and air conditioning.

Charter schools are important to the community as well. It allows families to have options of different places to send their students to public school. Charter schools are also extremely diverse, and have a unique environment that is not quite present at all public schools. Having gone to a public school almost my whole schooling career, the experience prepared me well for high school and the International Baccalaureate program I have been accepted into. The teachers love their jobs, and the kids are able to feel engaged and included. There are 42 people in each grade at FCCS, which was really great to be able to get to know everybody and have a personal relationship with each one of my peers, as well as my teachers. FCCS is currently ranked #1 best charter elementary school in Maryland, as well as #1 best charter middle school in Maryland. MVMPCS is ranked #3 and #4, respectively.

Please understand that charter school funding does not take anything away from other public school students whatsoever, and this bill does not impact them at all. Public charter school students are all public school students too, but they do not receive a fair and equitable level of public funding compared to their peers in traditional public schools. Each public charter school student is given on average \$2,000 dollars less every single year, just because they

choose to attend a different kind of public school. This bill will cost about \$48 million per year, which is not much at all compared to the overall education spending in Maryland.

I ask on behalf of every single student currently attending or will in the future attend a Maryland charter school: please pass this crucial bill, and make sure that it is mandatory to include in the budget every year. Thank you, senators, for all you do for our community.