

BALTIMORE CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Brandon M. Scott
Mayor, City of Baltimore

Johnette A. Richardson
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of School Commissioners

Dr. Sonja Brookins Santelises
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**Testimony of the
Baltimore City Board of School Commissioners
In Opposition of Senate Bill 892
School Construction – Public Charter School Facility Fund – Establishment**

February 21, 2024

The Baltimore City Board of School Commissioners (the Board) opposes Senate Bill 892 because it would carve out school construction funding for a small select group of schools, allowing them to be funded ahead of public schools that may have more serious facility issues.

The Board currently has 31 charter schools within the City Schools portfolio. Of those 31 schools, about half are housed in City Schools owned buildings. As you know, the public school construction program is overseen by the IAC. In its requirements, the IAC receives a list of schools, by priority, from the local school board and the IAC then grades those projects and provides funding based upon available school construction dollars. In making a priority listing in Baltimore City, those charter schools that are housed in Baltimore City Public School System owned buildings are considered for inclusion into the priority list for funding. Those charter schools that are not within City Schools' buildings have an operator that has the ability to creatively raise funds and work with other organizations to tackle facility issues.

The Board supports the diverse portfolio of traditional schools, Charter schools, Transformation schools and Contract schools within the school district. However, the proposed legislation would impose tremendous cost on City Schools by placing further strain on the already limited facilities funding the district receives. And, even if this is an additional source of school construction funds, solely for charters, it then allows charters to compete against schools in its own district and possibly receive funds ahead of a school that is in far worse condition.

It is well-established that City Schools faces significant capital needs for the school system's buildings. In addition, City Schools is a district that is regularly closing and merging schools, as well as returning buildings via surplus to the City of Baltimore, because of lower enrollment and the inability to adequately support facility needs. The idea of carving out additional state funding for charter school facilities when there is already insufficient funding to support the current facility needs in Baltimore City creates inequities between charter and traditional schools – both of which are part of the public school system under Maryland law.

City Schools estimates that more than \$3.86 billion (in today's dollars) is needed to bring all City Schools school buildings up to minimally acceptable standards through repairs and replacements to the remaining facilities that are still in need of a complete overhaul due to

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their age and conditions, even after the 21st Century School Buildings Program and the Built to Learn Act of 2020 have been fully implemented.

With the 21st Century School Buildings Program, the school board pays approximately \$20 million dollars, per year, in bond payments in order to support the construction of those newly renovated buildings; \$20 million that could have been used for instruction, interventions and other school related teaching expenses. Charter schools have the same ability to seek funding for facility issues from outside entities and pay for those costs. The issue of not receiving facility funding for charters was well discussed during the passage of the Public School Charter law in Maryland.

Also, given current inflationary pressures on construction costs, there is ample evidence that facility issues with in City Schools is even more concerning and the \$3.86 billion significantly underestimates the full costs of addressing these unmet systemic facility renovation needs, and that even more funding would be required to complete a full portfolio replacement to the educational standards recommended by the IAC, and utilized by other school districts in Maryland and across the nation.

For the foregoing reasons, the Baltimore City Board of School Commissioners opposes Senate Bill 892 and urges an unfavorable report.

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