



February 21, 2024

Written Testimony for SB0892

As the Chief Executive Officer of the Chesapeake Lighthouse Foundation (CLF), a non-profit charter school operator dedicated to providing innovative and world-class educational opportunities to students in Maryland, I am writing to express our fervent support for Senate Bill 0892 (SB0892). My journey in education has taken me across the globe, from teaching English as a Foreign Language to leading the development of charter schools in several states, including Maryland. A belief in innovation, equity, and the transformative power of quality schooling drives my commitment to education.

Throughout my career, I have been privileged to witness firsthand the profound impact that a nurturing, well-equipped educational environment can have on student achievement and growth. However, in my various roles—from teacher and principal to executive director and now CEO—I have also encountered the significant challenges public charter schools face in securing adequate facilities. These challenges are not just operational but deeply affect our mission to deliver the best possible education to our students.

SB0892 represents a crucial step towards addressing these challenges by establishing a fund managed by the Interagency Commission on School Construction (IAC). This fund would allow public charter schools in Maryland to apply for up to \$2,000 per pupil annually for eligible facilities-related expenses. Notably, the introduction of this fund would not impact the existing Blueprint formula or detract from the resources allocated to other public school students. Instead, it ensures that public funds are utilized more effectively, allowing us to focus our resources on enhancing the educational experiences within our classrooms rather than on the maintenance of our buildings.

The need for such a measure is evident. Public charter schools currently do not have the same access to capital funding and general funds as Local Education Agencies (LEAs), placing us at a disadvantage when it comes to supporting our facilities. This disparity is not just a financial issue; it is a matter of equity. All public school students, regardless of the type of public school they attend, deserve to be educated in safe, welcoming, and adequately equipped buildings. The current situation, wherein families choosing charter schools for their children's education often find those schools housed in older, more dilapidated buildings, needs to be revised. It needs to be more equitable for our charter school unionized teachers to work and county students to learn in environments that need more space, amenities, or support.

Our advocacy for SB0892 is rooted in a belief in fairness and the conviction that all students in Maryland deserve the best possible educational opportunities. As we mark over two decades of public charter schools in our state, it is time to ensure that these institutions are supported in a manner that reflects their value and contributions to the public education system.

I urge you to support SB0892, not only on behalf of the Chesapeake Lighthouse Foundation but the entire charter school community in Maryland, including more than 24,000 families and 53 schools across eight districts. Your support for this bill is a vote for educational equity, innovation, and the future success of all students in our state.

Sincerely,

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Chesapeake Lighthouse Foundation Chief Executive Officer