

Testimony in Support of House Bill 1: Built to Learn Act of 2020 House Appropriations Committee | January 23, 2020

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The Chesapeake Climate Action Network (CCAN) Action Fund supports House Bill 1, the Built to Learn Act of 2020, which invests \$2.2 billion in school construction to ensure our children learn in safe, clean, healthy, and modern educational facilities. We applaud Speaker Jones, her leadership team, and the Appropriations Committee for continuing to make this historic investment a top priority during the 2020 legislative session.

CCAN Action Fund and our grassroots network throughout Maryland is dedicated to achieving a net zero greenhouse gas emission economy by 2045, as is recommended by the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). To create this future, we must invest in frontline and historically disadvantaged communities, protect workers, create good-paying union jobs, and result in greater wealth and income equality.

Climate change is not just an environmental issue. It is an educational issue, too. According to research released this month by Dr. Michael Gilraine, an economist at New York University, the removal of air pollution can increase test scores by the same amount as cutting class sizes by one-third.¹ To put that in perspective, Maryland has the fourth most premature deaths due to air pollution in the nation.²

Climate change will play a negative role in student learning in more ways than air pollution. Extreme heat has a strong negative impact on educational outcomes, with one Harvard study showing, "Taking an exam on a 90 degrees Fahrenheit day relative to a 72 degrees Fahrenheit day leads to a 0.19 standard deviation reduction in performance, equivalent to a quarter of the Black-White achievement gap, and a 12.3% higher likelihood of failing an exam."³ Between 1986 and 2010, Maryland averaged 6.3 days per year of temperature above 95 degrees. If we continue at our current path of climate inaction, it is likely that Marylanders will see as many as 35 days of 95 degrees per year by 2050 and 86 days above 95 degrees per year by 2090.⁴

¹ Gilraine, Michael. (2020). Air Filters, Pollution and Student Achievement. (EdWorkingPaper: 20-188). Annenberg Institute at Brown University.

² Maninder P. S. Thind, Christopher W. Tessum, Inês L. Azevedo, and Julian D. Marshall Environmental Science & Technology 2019 53 (23), 14010-14019

³ Jisung Park. (2017). Temperature, Test Scores, and Human Capital Production. Harvard University.

⁴ Maryland Department of Environment. (2015). Summary of American Climate Prospectus Data Describing Climate Impacts for Maryland.

The Built to Learn Act presents the kind of infrastructure modernization needed to avert the climate crisis and help our students succeed in school, but only if new schools are built to meet zero emissions standards. The current standard in state law, LEED Silver, is out-of-date with the latest climate science. To have any chance of limiting the world's global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius, the foundational basis of the Paris Agreement, retiring infrastructure in the buildings sector must be replaced with net zero emissions versions.

Maryland is already on the cutting edge of zero emissions schools. In 2017, Wilde Lake Middle School in Howard County became the state's first net zero emissions school, relying on rooftop solar, geothermal heating, and energy-efficient architecture and insulation. Two more are on their way in Baltimore City: Graceland Park/O'Donnell Heights Elementary/Middle School and Holabird Elementary/Middle School.

The projects prove that zero emissions schools can be built at minimal upfront incremental costs as compared to schools that produce greenhouse gases. The Maryland Energy Administration provided an average of \$2.7 million in grants for the three schools to reach net zero building status, funded by merger settlement money. According to the U.S. Department of Energy, "zero energy schools can use between 65%–80% less energy than conventionally constructed schools." That means those upfront costs will quickly be recouped—and then turn into savings—due to energy efficiency.

To be clear, CCAN Action Fund does not propose amendment language at this time and is in no way in favor of the state building fewer schools because of these upfront costs. Instead, we stand ready to work with members of the Committee to develop financing options that allow school districts to move forward with the same number of projects and use a portion of their energy savings to pay back the incremental construction cost. Two possible ideas could be: to partner with the Maryland Economic Development Corporation to provide loans; or have districts enter "pay for performance" agreements with private-sector entities that are repaid a portion of the energy savings in return for covering the initial construction cost.

We can no longer ignore our school construction backlog. We can no longer ignore the climate crisis. We urge the Committee to fully explore adopting a net zero emissions school building standard and give House Bill 1 a favorable report. Thank you.

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