

USGBC: MD HB1 Testimony

My name is Sara Berman and I'm testifying today on behalf of the U.S. Green Building Council and its Maryland community.

Maryland is poised to make a significant investment in its students with a dedicated school construction and renovation program. Research has shown that where our students learn matters. Schools that are well designed and constructed facilitate learning, as well as health and wellness.

We have a name for this: green schools. Green schools are those that are high performing across a range of outcomes:

- 1.** Green schools are better for budgets because they are designed to save money over the life span of the school building through reduced utilities expense and reduced absenteeism. Green schools can be built at or below regional K-12 construction costs and operated within facilities budgets.
- 2.** Green schools improve health, wellness and academic performance by creating an environment where students and teachers are more comfortable, less prone to illness and more focused on teaching and learning.
- 3.** Green schools are better for the planet because they reduce environmental impact, conserve resources, and contribute to educating the next generation of environmental stewards.

Maryland has long been a leader in green schools. Schools like Forth Worthington Elementary & Middle in Baltimore, Wilde Lake Middle School in Columbia, and Deep Run Elementary in Elkridge, show what is possible when integrated design and green building principles are applied, along with independent third-party verification to ensure that that state and school boards get the projects they intended.

Unfortunately, a phrase changed in a large bill two years ago threatens Maryland's green schools' leadership. Prior to this change, state-funded public schools in Maryland fell under the state green building program, and were required to achieve and obtain green building certification, with several options available. The enactment of the 21st Century Schools Act however, required the Maryland Green Building Council, a state entity, to establish green school guidelines without certification; thus school projects are being built without the benefit of green school verification processes.

This independent-third party verification is a crucial step in building high performing schools. Certification provides valuable transparency and assurance to the State Legislature and to the public that tax dollars are being used to deliver the high performing schools by verifying project teams are delivering on key aspects of design plans and goals. This accountability is needed to optimize the ability for each school to have the beneficial cost/benefit, health, and environmental outcomes previously outlined.

Finally, with HB1, Maryland intends to issue anticipatory bonds to fund school construction. Green building certification is a proven, cost-effective means to boost investor confidence in a bond, and hence the bond's attractiveness to the market. Green building certification of the school projects is a way to bound and verify the use of proceeds. Generally, building certification bodies are simpler, more streamlined, and cost effective compared to other alternatives (e.g., a consultancy).

We ask this committee to support an amendment to HB1 to restore Maryland's leadership on green schools, by ensuring the state's investment in public schools is protected with third party certification. Tomorrow's students will thank you.