

USGBC Maryland

RE: Support Amendment to SB655

Good afternoon Senator Pinsky and members of the committee.

I am here today in support of the sponsor's amendment to Senate Bill 655. My name is Sara Berman and I'm testifying today on behalf of the U.S. Green Building Council and its Maryland community, and as a Baltimore Public School Parent.

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.

As a public school parent I want accountability and fiscal responsibility for my tax dollars and for the future of education in Maryland. Maryland currently spends \$600,000 a day on energy for state buildings. This is not something which can continue. Moving forward our state buildings and particularly are schools need to be effective learning environments and efficient buildings. How do we put a cost measurement on better performance from students, teachers, and state employees from better health and cognitive outcomes in green buildings? It comes through higher graduation rates, employee retention, increased productivity, fewer sick days.

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. We note that the High Performance Green Building Program provides flexibility, in allowing schools to choose among LEED, Green Globes, or the code supplement IgCC. Until 2019, schools benefited from certification or verification that the design and construction complied with the green building system requirements and credits; but currently, there is no required certification or verification.

Senate Bill 0655 is a significant step in the right direction. This Bill requires K-12 schools to follow the High Performance Green Building Program, as was required prior to 2019, and as is required for any other State funded college, community college, or state building. It requires any state project with more than 50% funding to use the High Performance Green Building Program as developed by the Maryland Green Building Council. This allows flexibility and also achieves significantly more efficient and healthy buildings than a code minimum requirement.

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.

In conclusion, I support the amendment to SB655.

Sincerely,

Sara Berman, USGBC Maryland, Market Leadership Advisory Board