

Dear Senator Joanne C. Benson:

I am James B. Gardiner and I am writing to you today, as a/the CEO at Owner Rep Consulting to ask you for your support of SB0646 School Construction - Public Charter School Facility Fund - Establishment sponsored by Senator McCray.

As a member of the Senate Budget and Tax Committee, this bill will be before you on March 7th. I am writing to share why this bill is essentially to pass. Maryland public charter schools are an integral part of the public school portfolio in Maryland, serving more than 24,000 students statewide. The communities with public charter schools, the teachers and staff that work there, the districts that include them, and the students that attend them would all benefit directly from the much needed funding SB0646 would supply.

LEAs are able to utilize capital funding and general funds from other sources, not available to public charter schools, to support their facilities, operations, & maintenance. SB0646 seeks to establish a fund managed by the IAC that allows public charter schools to apply for up to \$2000 per pupil annually for eligible facilities-related expenses. This funding does not impact the Blueprint formula or take funding away from any other public school students, as the funding would come from the State's General Fund. Instead, SB0646 will allow more Blueprint dollars to be spent IN the classroom on learning instead of ON the school's facility. It also sets strong parameters around spending accountability and transparency while ensuring there is standard bond bill language on repayment if a school should close or sell a privately-owned building.

Charter school students are public school students and they deserve to be educated in safe, welcoming, adequate school buildings just like their traditional public school peers. Just because a family decides to send their children to a public charter school and stay in the public school system, why do they have to attend, on average, an older, more in need of repair, discarded building? Why do charter school teachers have to teach in buildings that do not have adequate space, amenities, or supports? Why do charter school operators have to pull funding out of their Blueprint dollars to pay for their buildings, while traditional schools & LEAs pull from capital funding and general funds? Bottom line, it isn't equitable. Through your support, we can work to close inequities public charter school students, families, and teachers experience in their school buildings every day.

This year we celebrate 20 years of the charter school law in Maryland. It is about time we get to work funding public charter school facilities. We look forward to the hearing on March 7th and your support of SB0646, School Construction - Public Charter School Facility Fund - Establishment. Please know that it is not only myself, but the larger charter school community across the state of more than 24,000 families, 50 schools in seven districts standing behind you. Thanks.

Sincerely,



James B. Gardiner