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TESTIMONY ON SB0646- POSITION: FAVORABLE
School Construction – Public Charter School Facility Fund -- Establishment

Good Afternoon Chair Guzzone, Vice-Chair Rosapepe, and members of the Budget and Taxation Committee. My name is David Miller, and I serve as the Regional Facilities Director for Imagine Schools Mid-Atlantic Region. Imagine Schools operates four public charter schools in Prince George's County that serve over 1,600 scholars in Kindergarten through 8th Grades; as Regional Facilities Director I manage four campuses comprising 177,500 square feet across nine buildings. I am submitting this testimony in support of Senate Bill 646, providing the Establishment of a Charter School Facility Fund.

Charter schools play a crucial role in providing quality education options for students in Maryland. Our schools have unique needs and face significant challenges when it comes to securing and maintaining suitable facilities. Each day, my team and I are forced to make decisions based on a limited amount of funds to support the management and maintenance of our school facilities. Our school buildings range in age from 69 to 11 years old.

We know that each decision, from fixing a leaky roof to re-painting a drab classroom, impacts funds that could be spent on learning: curriculum, books for classroom libraries, technology acquisition. And some issues aren't decisions: HVAC unit repairs are urgent; life safety issues have to be addressed immediately. Across the country, facilities issues, inadequate facilities, and their impact on charter schools' budgets are one of the primary causes for charter school closings.

That's why there is a critical need for a dedicated charter schools facility fund in Maryland. This fund would prevent public charter schools from having to dip into the per-pupil allotment funding stream from their authorizers to address a majority of facilities expenses. This is a simple question of equity: currently, why does a charter school student in Maryland not have access to the same level of facilities funding support as their friend at the neighboring traditional public school? When that scholar's parents enroll them in a charter school, are they not entitled to the same full faith and credit of the State of Maryland that their peers have access to in facilities that are renovated or newly constructed?

Overall, a dedicated charter schools facility fund in Maryland is essential to ensure that charter schools have equal access to resources and support as traditional public schools.

By investing in our facilities, we can improve the educational experience and outcomes of our scholars, promote greater equity in education, and create a brighter future for Maryland's children. I respectfully urge this committee to return a favorable report on SB0646.