



CHESAPEAKE LIGHTHOUSE FOUNDATION

Lighting The Way For Excellence in Education!

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Written Testimony for HB 1061

As the STEM and Outreach Manager at the Chesapeake Lighthouse Foundation, a dedicated non-profit charter school operator in Maryland, I am reaching out to express our unwavering support for House Bill 1061 (HB1061), a critical piece of legislation poised to transform the landscape of capital funding for facilities within our public charter schools. Our role within the foundation places us at the intersection of educational programming and community engagement, offering us a unique perspective on the direct impact that adequate, safe, and technologically equipped facilities have on the quality of STEM education and overall student success.

For over two decades, CLF public charter schools have been innovative leaders in providing specialized educational opportunities, particularly in STEM fields. Yet, despite our commitment to excellence and innovation, charter schools need help funding the facilities that house our vibrant learning communities. Unlike Local Education Agencies (LEAs), which can access capital funding and general funds from various sources to support their facilities, operations, and maintenance, public charter schools have been primarily left to navigate these financial burdens with limited resources.

HB1061 proposes an equitable solution to this challenge by establishing a fund managed by the Interagency Commission on School Construction (IAC). This fund would enable public charter schools to apply for up to \$2,000 per pupil annually for eligible facilities-related expenses, ensuring that our students can learn in environments that are not only safe and welcoming but also conducive to the high demands of modern STEM education. Importantly, this funding mechanism is designed to complement the Blueprint for Maryland's Future, allowing Blueprint dollars to be more effectively allocated towards enhancing instructional quality rather than covering the costs associated with facility maintenance and operations.

The provision of HB1061 is independent of the resources available to other public school students. Instead, it offers a targeted approach to address the disparities in facilities funding, grounded in principles of accountability, transparency, and fiscal responsibility. By enabling public charter schools to access state general funds for facilities, we can ensure that every dollar allocated to education directly benefits the learning experience of our students, particularly in critical areas like science, technology, engineering, and mathematics.

Charter school students are public school students, deserving of every opportunity to thrive in environments that stimulate curiosity, foster innovation, and prepare them for the challenges of the future. However, the current inequity in facilities funding often places our students and teachers at a disadvantage, compelling us to divert essential resources away from educational programs towards maintaining aging and inadequate buildings. This is not just a matter of fiscal policy; it is a question of equity, justice, and our collective commitment to the future of education in Maryland.

As we stand on the brink of a historic decision, I urge you to support HB1061, not only as a legislative measure but as a statement of our shared values and aspirations for the education of our children. Thank you for considering our support for HB1061.

Sincerely,

Ashish Vadalia
STEM and Outreach Manager, Chesapeake Lighthouse Foundation