



March 5, 2024

Written Testimony for HB1061

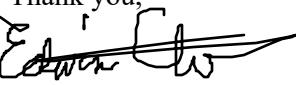
Thank you, Chairperson and Committee Members, for allowing me the opportunity to testify in favor of HB1061. My name is Edwin Avent, and I am the CEO of the Five Smooth Stones Foundation, the Baltimore Collegiate School for Boys (BCSB) operator. BCSB is a 4th through 8th grade charter school serving boys throughout the city of Baltimore.

Schools like BCSB can utilize capital funding and general funds from other sources, not available to public charter schools, to support our facilities, operations, & maintenance. HB1061 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, HB1061 will allow Blueprint dollars to be spent IN the classroom on learning instead of ON the school's facility. Currently, BCSB spends over \$860,000.00 a year on rent and maintenance for our school building. That amount is 50% of our operating budget after subtracting our school staff salaries and benefits. Because of that, we are forced to do fundraising from the philanthropic community to fund essential elements needed to run a school. HB1061 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 who 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 support? 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 daily in their school buildings.

We have had more than 20 years of public charter schools in Maryland. It is about time we get to work funding their public school facilities. We look forward to the vote today and your support of HB1061. Please know that it is not only myself, but the larger charter school community across the state of more than 24,000 families, 53 schools in eight districts standing behind you.

If you have any questions or comments, please do not hesitate to reach out. I can be reached at the information below. Please pass HB1061.

Thank you,

Edwin V. Avent
CEO
Baltimore Collegiate School for Boys
Five Smooth Stones Foundation