

March 1, 2024

Re: In favor of HB 1061 School Construction - Public Charter School Facility Fund

Delegate Barnes, Delegate Chang, and other Esteemed Delegates,

Teaching is hard. It doesn't look like what it looked like when I was a student or probably when you were a student. The education landscape looks different from when I first became a teacher over fifteen years ago. But, I love it and I wake up every day and choose it. I have dedicated my life to this profession and I feel lucky to be doing the work that I do. However, I am finding it hard to do my work simply because of where I teach.

As a teacher and aspiring school administrator in a public charter school, and also as a proud parent of a child enrolled in a public charter school, I have firsthand knowledge of the exceptional work happening in our state's public charter schools. Public charter schools support the education of over 24,000 Maryland students, and if put together we would be the 11th largest school district in the state! Public charter schools provide families and students with a variety of alternative educational models (Montessori, Classical Education, STEM focus, environmental and sustainability based education, dual language models, and more) because some students just need something different - and we feel honored to be able to offer that to them. Although our delivery mode may look different, we are *public schools* and we are beholden to the same state and local standards for academic achievement as a traditional public school. Our employees must meet the same professional qualifications and requirements for continuing education, and often must engage in additional training that is specific to their educational model. One thing that is not the same as our traditional public school counterparts, however, is funding for facilities. Simply put, we don't receive any. LEAs are able to utilize capital funding and general funds from other sources to support their facilities, operations, and maintenance. Charter schools do not have this option. We receive no funding for facilities, which then means we have to use money that would otherwise go to instruction and adequate staffing to pay for mortgage, rent, repairs, grounds and building maintenance, and a slew of other related facilities expenses.

Take my school for instance. At Carroll Creek Montessori Public Charter School in Frederick County Public Schools, we spend over \$500,000 a year for facilities. We have to take money away from supporting instruction and social-emotional development of our children just to put a roof over our heads. And actually, that current roof of ours isn't so great and regularly leaks. Our building desperately needs a new roof, HVAC, and plumbing updates, but we are struggling to afford the repairs. We have looked for a new building for almost ten years, and have seriously considered over 60 and put in Letters of Intent on at least 12 buildings, but things always break down because of - you guessed it - lack of facilities funding.

We have struggling math students but no money to afford a Math Specialist or Interventionist. We have a hero of a principal who single-handedly performs at least three jobs that would be separate paid positions in a traditional public school, but there is simply no money to actually

fund those desperately-needed positions. We do not have adequate spacing or proper outdoor space. We should not have to choose between doing what is best for children OR putting a roof over our heads. We are public schools and our students and staff deserve both.

I ask for your consideration and support of HB 1061 School Construction-Public Charter School Facility Fund. This bill seeks to establish a fund managed by the IAC that allows public charter schools to apply for reimbursement up to \$2000 per pupil annually for actual eligible facilities-related expenses. It also provides a mechanism for federal funding to flow to Maryland, which cannot occur without establishment of this fund. This commensurate investment in education does not impact the Blueprint formula nor take funding away from any other public school students, as the funding would come from the State's General Fund. Instead, HB 1061 will allow more Blueprint operating 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.

The children in my school and other public charter schools are Maryland public school students. The educators that I am privileged to work alongside are public school teachers. Yet, we are asked to operate with less. This is not equitable, but you can help change that and help balance the inequities we currently face. Please know that you have not only my support in this effort, but the support of the larger charter school community across the state - more than 24,000 students, 53 schools in eight districts. We need you.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I invite you to come tour our school in Frederick, Maryland to see our school, meet our children, learn about the authentic and FREE Montessori education we provide to children in Frederick County, and see with your own eyes why your support of this bill is so important.

With many thanks,  
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