

February 26, 2024

The Honorable Benjamin S. Barnes, Chair  
Appropriations Committee  
Room 121  
House Office Building  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Re: House Bill 365 – School Construction – Local Cost-Share – Alterations

Dear Chairman Barnes:

I write to request your support for House Bill 365 – School Construction – Local Cost-Share – Alterations. By adjusting the school construction funding percentage for Kent County Public Schools, this legislation will make it possible to replace the Kent County Middle School facility in Chestertown, a building that in its current condition is a hurdle to educating students. The legislation will change the State funding percentage for Kent County Public Schools from the current 50% of eligible costs to approximately 84% to 88%, an increase of approximately \$17 million in State funding. Without this increase, the project cannot proceed.


As former Executive Director of the Maryland Public School Construction Program from 2003 to 2016, I am keenly aware that standard funding practices should not be altered lightly. At the same time, a core mission of the Interagency Commission on School Construction (IAC) is to achieve equitable instructional facilities across the state. This was the basis for amending the Education Article in the Built to Learn Act. This alteration in the State funding formula at §5-303.K is currently allowing Garrett County Public Schools to replace an obsolete facility in the Oakland area and to reduce the size of its facility portfolio, benefitting both the students and the overall operational efficiency of the school system.

At stake is an issue of equity. Like their peers in Garrett County, middle school students in Kent County should be able to learn in a modern, safe, and educationally appropriate facility. The existing Kent County Middle School building, the single middle school that serves every student in the county, forces teachers to overcome daily hurdles that demand time and energy that should be devoted to instruction. The facility lacks purpose-designed science laboratories for STEM and STEAM instruction, spaces to support the middle school team-teaching instructional methodology, and sufficient rooms for special education. Small group and one-on-one instruction, which is essential for students with special needs, often occurs in areas without privacy or isolation from noise and visual distractions. Many of the regular classrooms lack daylight and are separated from hallways or adjacent instructional areas by thin partitions without acoustic insulation. The Health Suite, Library/Media Center, Art Room, and Music Room do not meet the spatial and environmental standards of new middle schools in the state. The building is not compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act, lacking an elevator to the second floor, an accessible front entrance, or a single accessible restroom. Finally, this aged building has a number of code deficiencies and shows some structural deterioration, while many of its building systems are obsolete and require continuous maintenance.

The deficiencies at Kent County Middle School are so extensive that partial renovations or targeted system upgrades would be an ineffective use of State and local funds. Based on a thorough feasibility study, the Board of Education determined that the facility should be replaced on the site of the existing building in Chestertown. This approach is supported by the County government, and the IAC has approved design funds for the project. Despite this high level of support, the gap in funding is insurmountable without the increase of State funding participation that HB 365 will deliver.

Your support for HB 365 will ensure that middle school students in Kent County have access to the same educational opportunities as their peers in other school systems in Maryland. I will be more than happy to meet with you and members of the Appropriations Committee to discuss this important project. Thank you for your attention to education in Kent County.

Sincerely,



David Lever, AIA D.Arch  
Principal, Educational Facilities Planning LLC

cc: The Honorable Benjamin S. Barnes, Chair  
The Honorable Mark S. Chang, Vice-Chair  
The Honorable Gabriel Acevero  
The Honorable Carl L. Anderton, Jr.  
The Honorable Mark Edelson  
The Honorable Catherine M. Forbes  
The Honorable Jefferson L. Ghrist  
The Honorable Kevin M. Harris  
The Honorable James C. Hinebaugh, Jr.  
The Honorable R. Julian Ivey  
The Honorable Dana C. Jones  
The Honorable Jazz M. Lewis  
The Honorable Nino Mangione  
The Honorable Aletheia R. McCaskill  
The Honorable Susan K. McComas  
The Honorable Richard W. Metzgar  
The Honorable Malcolm P. Ruff  
The Honorable Emily K. Shetty  
The Honorable Stephanie M. Smith  
The Honorable Jared Solomon  
The Honorable Ryan S. Spiegel  
The Honorable Joshua J. Stonko  
The Honorable M. Courtney Watson  
The Honorable Sarah S. Wolek  
Mr. Joseph Goetz, President, Board of Education  
Dr. Karen Couch, Superintendent of Schools  
Mr. Ronald H. Fithian, President, Board of County Commissioners