



# Kent County Board of Education

*Growing a Community of Leaders*

March 1, 2024

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

## **RE: HB0365/SB0110 School Construction – Local Cost-Share – Alterations**

Dear Chairman Barnes and members of the Appropriations Committee,

I am writing you today because our community is in urgent need of your support for House Bill 0365/Senate Bill 0110: School Construction – Local Cost-Share – Alterations. Passage of this bill is necessary for our rural community to receive the additional state support for we need new school construction.

Our community has one middle school serving all students in sixth through eighth grades. Kent County Middle School, located in our county seat of Chestertown, opened in 1950, was expanded four times between 1952 and 1976, and was last fully renovated in 1976. At nearly 75 years old, the building no longer meets the needs and standards of today's middle schools, nor can it be serviced through routine maintenance. Replacement of the roof alone would require millions of dollars.

Our community simply cannot afford the financial burden of new school construction with the state contributing only 50% of the eligible costs. Under the current funding formula, we are looking at a local share of more than \$45 million for a community with a total population of around 20,000 people. Add to that the fact that the poverty rate among our student population is such that all five of our schools receive the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Community Eligibility Provision providing free breakfast and lunch to every student.

That is why we are calling on you to support passage of HB0365/SB0110 in the General Assembly and deliver it to Gov. Wes Moore's desk for signature.

HB0365/SB0110 is narrowly tailored to fit very select circumstances for applicability to school construction projects. It takes a school system such as ours that currently qualifies for only a 50/50 split on eligible project costs with the state, then shifts the state share based on the following:

- The percentage of students in the county eligible for free or reduced price meals is greater than the statewide average of students eligible for free or reduced price meals;

- All schools in the county participate in the U.S. Department of Agriculture Community Eligibility Provision;
- The eligible project is a school that is the only elementary, middle or high school in the county.

By meeting all of those requirements, a qualifying school construction project would see the local cost share reduced to equal the average of counties in which all schools in the county participate in the U.S. Department of Agriculture Community Eligibility Provision, with the state cost share increasing respectively.

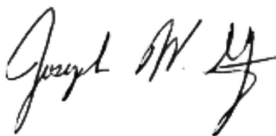
This is not the first time a proposal to adjust the school construction cost share has been approved. The Built to Learn Act of 2020, approved in 2021 via General Assembly override of then-Gov. Larry Hogan's veto of the Blueprint for Maryland's Future, included a cost share shift that benefitted Garrett County Public Schools. It increased the state's cost share of 50% to 89% based, like HB0365/SB0110, on a specifically focused set of requirements for the shift.

The Kent County Board of Education is asking for a similar amendment to make our middle school construction project possible. Kent County has not built a new school in nearly 50 years. Today, our community simply does not have the financial resources to build the new school we absolutely need to serve our students in those crucial middle-grade years of their education.

The General Assembly and the State of Maryland have made the successful education of students a cornerstone of public policy through the Blueprint for Maryland's Future. HB0365/SB0110 is part of that drive by helping Kent County Public Schools build a new middle school that meets today's educational standards and gives our students the chance of success they so deserve.

I hope I can count on you to advocate for and vote favorably on HB0365/SB0110 and give our community the new middle school it needs and our students the opportunity to succeed that they deserve.

Respectfully,



Joseph Goetz  
President  
Kent County Board of Education

cc: The Honorable Stephen S. Hershey, Jr.  
The Honorable Jay A. Jacobs  
The Honorable Steven J. Arentz  
The Honorable Jefferson L. Ghrist  
The Kent County Board of Education  
The County Commissioners of Kent County