

Dear Delegates,

I am Elizabeth Ward and I am writing to you today, as a parent and staff member at Chesapeake Public Charter School, to ask you for your support of HB1061 [School Construction - Public Charter School Facility Fund - Establishment](#) sponsored by Delegate Young.

As a member of the House Appropriations Committee, this bill will be before you on March 5th. I am writing to share why this bill is essential to pass. Maryland public charter schools are an integral part of the public school portfolio in Maryland, serving more than 24,000 students statewide. The communities with public charter schools, the teachers and staff that work there, the districts that include them, and the students that attend them would all benefit directly from the much needed funding HB1061 would supply.

LEAs are able to utilize capital funding and general funds from other sources, not available to public charter schools, to support their 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 more Blueprint 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.

Charter school students are public school students, and they 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 in their school buildings every day.

I knew when my son was only 2 years old that I wanted him to attend Chesapeake Public Charter School (CPCS) when he started school. I had heard about the school through some friends that had applied for the lottery but had not been chosen. So, I looked CPCS up and read everything I could about it. I loved the idea that the classes were small and that there would be a lot of hands-on learning through projects and environmental studies. I loved that the arts would be integrated into all subject areas and that he would be able to attend for his elementary and middle school years. My son is now in 8<sup>th</sup> grade at CPCS and has been a student since kindergarten. Everything that I read about the school all those years ago was true. His class has always been small, he has come home with stories about all the projects and experiments they have conducted while learning about even the simplest things, and he has brought home some amazing artwork created during Social Studies or ELA.

On top of all that, CPCS has always been like a family for us. The teachers, paraeducators, admin, and other staff have always taken excellent care of my son. He has had major struggles with his learning

disability, but they have never given up and he has grown so much. When we had losses in our family, they were there with kind words and actions to support us. When he had to attend court for a misdeed, there were so many people from CPCS who offered to stand with him and speak on his behalf because they knew who he really was. Above all, they showed him from day one how important and loved he is. Even though he will not benefit from this renewal and revised funding structure, I want to see this school thrive so that the students that are there now, and in the future, have the same amazing experience that he did.

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 hearing on March 5th and your support of HB1061, School Construction - Public Charter School Facility Fund - Establishment. 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.

Thank you,  
Elizabeth Ward