



March 5, 2024

Written Testimony for HB1061

Thank you, Chairpersons and Committee Members, for allowing me the opportunity to testify in favor of HB1061. My name is Rebecca Waters, and I am a parent of children at the Chesapeake Public Charter School in St. Mary's County, Maryland.

I have four children that have attended CPCS. Two are still in school there, one is a high school junior, and one graduated high school in 2022. The impact that CPCS has had on my children is immense, but none more so than my eldest son. My eldest is autistic and has ADHD and SPD. To say that school was difficult for him would be an understatement. He started school in a traditional public school, and lasted three years. After that, we were lucky enough to get a spot at CPCS. Where we had faced nothing but roadblocks in identifying the specific issues my son was having and push back for every service or intervention we requested at our old school, we found CPCS willing and eager to help. They were always looking for new and innovative ways that they could help him. Although ultimately he required placement in a non-public school due to his disabilities, Chesapeake Public Charter School remains the first positive experience we had in his schooling, and without their help, he would not be as successful as his is today.

It was due to their commitment to my son—and indeed all of the children that attend—that I committed to fundraising for the school. As you know, public charter schools do not receive the same funding that other public schools receive. We are forced to pay for our own facilities, and this often results in extreme amounts of fundraising. I spent 9 years fundraising for the school, four of them in charge of the committee, and each year we were tasked with raising tens of thousands of dollars just to keep the lights on. The time and effort required could be better spent focusing on supporting our students and teachers especially as we deal with the effects of a post-COVID world on our students. HB1061 would help our school stay open.

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 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 supports? 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.

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.

Thank you,
Rebecca Waters