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I am writing to you today to advocate for supporting HB 1061 - School Construction - Public Charter School Facility Fund - Establishment. I am a parent, teacher, and governing board member at Chesapeake Public Charter School (CPCS) in St. Mary's County. CPCS is a K-8 school that provides a whole child approach to educating 540 children from across our entire county. Most importantly to me, CPCS provides the whole child approach to my three children and allows me to fully educate my 60 fifth graders.

Our students are provided opportunities to learn outside of the classroom, through environmental stewardship activities. They are able to fully immerse themselves in learning, through our project based learning opportunities. Most importantly, they learn to build relationships, be kind humans, and work with others as we integrate grades and teach from Kindergarten through eighth grade. CPCS's students (and my own children) will become productive members of society through the "soft skills" that are directly taught in classes that do not exceed 20 students.

I have taught at elementary, middle, and high schools for the past 20 years. The community approach to learning implemented at CPCS is unparalleled. The commitment to teacher growth is inspiring. The integrate approach to education is necessary. Our students flourish in this environment.

Our academic and social emotional program success has served as a model for traditional public schools in our district, and our reciprocal relationship with the local board of education demonstrates how impactful a partnership between charters and traditional schools can be. We are truly a model that deserves to be replicated statewide.

CPCS families are ardent supporters of the school and its mission and have volunteered over 4,020 hours in the past year alone to support its mission. CPCS students learn how to be good stewards of our community as CPCS is a sustainable Green School and has an active CPCS CARES program that supports families in need. By integrating science and art, students expand their

mindset and become lifelong learners. The school offers a unique K-8 model and provides opportunities for students of varying ages to work together, learning from one another as they celebrate successes each week in our Community Gathering and participate in multi-grade “buddy” programs.

Recently, Maryland law, known as the Blueprint for Maryland’s Future (Blueprint), has put CPCS and other small schools at risk of losing critical funding. This would prevent CPCS from continuing to provide these opportunities for St. Mary’s County Public School children. Our current funding formula provides CPCS with 98% of our per pupil allocation from SMCPSS, with 2% remaining at the district level for overhead costs. CPCS does not receive revenue to assist with facilities costs as dictated by the Maryland Charter School law. Currently, CPCS spends 12% of its operating budget on facilities including the building mortgage, building maintenance, cleaning services, snow removal, and utilities. 81% of the operating funds are allocated to salaries. With the updated funding structure from the Blueprint for Maryland’s Future, CPCS would not have sufficient funds to meet those needs and continue the amazing learning opportunities it offers to students across the county.

We all know that one of the most important investments our community can make is in our children. According to the Brookings Institution “investment in community schools can yield important economic outcomes for both individuals and communities.”<sup>1</sup> and “the community schools approach to family engagement helps cultivate leadership and relationships that, in turn, can facilitate greater civic involvement.” Isn’t this what we want for St. Mary’s County?

I implore you to support HB 1061 establishing the Public Charter School Facility Fund. As Blueprint cripples the ability for community based schools, such as CPCS, to provide critical skills for our children, this funding would be instrumental in allowing us to continue our mission while being commensurately funded. Show your support for our children, our choices, and our community. Support SB646.

With warm regards,

Emily G. Meny

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<https://www.brookings.edu/articles/why-local-leaders-should-champion-community-schools-to-improve-student-family-and-neighborhood-well-being/>

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