

Written Testimony

House Appropriations Committee

February 20, 2024

Subject: Testimony for HB 643: School Construction Revolving Loan Fund - The Maryland

School for the Blind - Eligibility

Support

Honorable Ben Barnes, Chair

House Appropriations Committee - Room 121

House Office Building

Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear Chair Barnes,

In connection with HB 643, I would like to advocate for the inclusion of The Maryland School for the Blind in the School Construction Revolving Loan Fund. This inclusion is critical for our institution, as it would significantly aid in financing major construction projects essential to our facilities' continuous improvement and the services we provide to our students.

The State acknowledged the infrastructural needs and permanently included MSB in the school construction program during the FY23 session of the General Assembly. This inclusion was a testament to the State's commitment to supporting the unique needs of our students in the ongoing completion of its current Campus Master Plan and providing for future capital needs for years to come.

We face a significant challenge in funding more extensive projects, such as the new athletic facilities included in the master plan.

This project requires considerable upfront capital. MSB is thankful for the funding it receives from the Interagency Commission (IAC). This funding is disbursed in annual installments, which, in the case of more extensive projects, does not keep pace with the rapid rate and high construction costs. The timing of these disbursements does not align with the immediate financial requirements of such large-scale projects.

The Maryland School for the Blind is excluded from the Revolving Loan Fund Program due to a technicality related to the legislative language used for the fund, specifically limiting the use of the funds for local governments.

We propose a minor adjustment to the existing legislation to address this issue. This change would enable The Maryland School for the Blind to become eligible for the Revolving Loan Fund Program, which aligns with our previously granted inclusion in the State construction program. This amendment is not intended to alter the primary purpose or scope of the fund but to correct an oversight that currently limits our access to crucial funding.

The role of The Maryland School for the Blind is to educate Maryland students who are blind or have low vision. Access to adequate funding for our construction projects is essential to ensure our students receive the quality education and resources they deserve and to support the school's capital needs.

I urge the Committee to support including The Maryland School for the Blind in the School Construction Revolving Loan Fund Program through Bill HB 643 of 2024. Your support for this bill will be an important step towards equitable education and resource allocation for all students in Maryland, demonstrating a commitment to the needs of students with vision loss.

Thank you for considering this testimony and for your ongoing support of education in Maryland.

Sincerely,

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cc: Members, House Appropriations Committee