



Thurgood Marshall Hall
7805 Regents Drive
College Park, Maryland 20742
301-405-6330
spp.umd.edu

February 2, 2024

To: House Environment and Transportation Committee

RE: Favorable Report of HB 428 - Community Schools - Rental Assistance for Community School Families Program and Fund – Establishment

I applaud the leadership of Delegate Stewart in addressing this critical issue impacting children and families across Maryland. I am Brandi Slaughter. I serve as an Associate Clinical Professor at the School of Public Policy and director of the Karabelle Pizzigati Initiative in Advocacy for Children, Youth and Families. Founded in 2016, the Karabelle Pizzigati Initiative honors the life and legacy of the late Karabelle Pizzigati, who was a life-long champion for children and families, especially those from underserved communities. Through university coursework and experiential learning, the initiative aims to build a diverse pipeline of informed and effective advocates to ensure all children are healthy, safe, learning, and joyful. With great enthusiasm, I urge you to consider a favorable report for HB 428 - Community Schools - Rental Assistance for Community School Families Program and Fund - Establishment.

Stable housing is foundational to children’s growth and well-being. Housing instability is well recognized as a social determinant of health and leads to wide-ranging negative outcomes for children. Beyond health, housing instability negatively impacts student school performance, and the stress of the instability can translate into emotional and behavioral problems in children. Families without housing supports are at higher risk for their children entering Maryland’s overburdened child welfare system. Unfortunately, the state has not done enough to support children whose families face eviction, or are unhoused, that move from home to home, or live in precarious situations.

In Maryland, over 260 community schools cater to students and families from birth to adulthood. Rooted in the principle of equity, the community school strategy directs focus to the strengths within traditionally underserved communities, establishing crucial partnerships to provide essential services to students, families, and the broader community. These schools aim to guarantee access to health services, mental health support, academic enrichment, out-of-school time programs, crisis assistance, adult education classes, leadership development, and a host of other indispensable resources. It is imperative to underscore that, despite their extensive array of services, community schools currently lack the crucial provision of housing assistance—an issue at the forefront of many community members minds.

The housing crisis extends beyond families associated with community schools. In Maryland, the shortage of 96,000 homes, a result of years of inadequate construction, has triggered a troubling ripple effect, leading to a widespread surge in both home prices and rents. This distressing reality compounds the struggles of numerous working families

who are already grappling with a multitude of hardships.

Ensuring accessible and affordable housing for children and their families is not just a matter of shelter but a fundamental investment in our collective future. Children only experience one childhood, and it should not be overshadowed by the worry of having a secure roof over their heads. For kids to succeed and thrive in society, their basic needs must be met. Without a safe and stable place to sleep at night, no child can fully focus on their education. Children represent the future of our state, and it is imperative that we afford them a childhood where not only are their basic needs met but their needs are prioritized.

Our children will contribute significantly to the well-being and prosperity of our society. Because history, research and reports from the field indicate that housing instability is a major problem among children, I urge favorable consideration for HB 428 - Community Schools - Rental Assistance for Community School Families Program and Fund - Establishment, recognizing it as a pivotal step towards a more equitable and promising future for Maryland's children and families.

Respectfully submitted,

Brandi N. Slaughter, JD
Associate Clinical Professor
Program Director, Karabelle Pizzigati Initiative in Advocacy for Children and Families
Associate Director of Outreach, Maryland Initiative on Learning & Equity
(MILE)