



HB0428 – Community Schools - Rental Assistance for Community School Families Program and Fund - Establishment

Hearing of Budget and Taxation Committee, March 26, 2024

Position: Favorable

SUPPORT: HB 428 will help meet a critical need by ensuring that Community Schools staff have an efficient way to secure funds to prevent evictions, provide rental assistance, and provide other resources to support students whose families are struggling with unsafe housing, the threat of homelessness, and homelessness.

ACDS serves as Anne Arundel County's nonprofit housing and community development agency, helping Anne Arundel County residents thrive through their ability to obtain and maintain safe, stable, and affordable housing. As part of fulfilling this role, ACDS administers an Eviction Prevention Program using federal, State and local funds. ACDS also administers grants to other nonprofits providing eviction prevention funding and works closely with the County's Continuum of Care, the Coalition to End Homelessness, and foundations and faith-based organizations that help households at risk of eviction.

We frequently work with Pupil Personnel Workers, McKinney-Vento Liaisons and others connected to our local schools to try to help school families struggling with housing instability and homelessness. We know the lengths to which these school employees go to try to pull together resources for families in crisis so they can find housing, keep housing, or replace unsafe housing with safe and stable housing. ***Our dedicated school PPWs and McKinney-Vento liaisons scramble tirelessly looking for financial assistance for families facing eviction and experiencing homelessness***, reaching out to multiple sources at once and navigating the complex eligibility and paperwork requirements of many different programs, not to mention trying to keep track of what organizations may or may not have funding at any given time. ***The Rental Assistance Program contemplated by this bill will eliminate that scramble by keeping the rental assistance piece of the families' need for assistance "in-house."***

The amendments to the bill resulting in implementation of the Program by the Department of Housing and Community Development with assistance from school staff rather than the other way around will ensure that the new program runs smoothly and effectively, with a minimum of new administrative burdens on either DHCD or MSDE. DHCD is already well-positioned to implement the Program, having been instrumental in the successful distribution of rental assistance funds during the pandemic, and as noted above, MSDE staff already identify families in need and provide connections to resources. The creativity, flexibility, and collaboration between the bill sponsors, DHCD, MSDE and advocates is to be commended.

For the reasons noted above, ACDS urges the Committee to issue a FAVORABLE report on HB 428.

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