

Feb. 7, 2025

Support for HB0736 School Construction – Local Cost-Share – Alterations

Dear members of the House Appropriations Committee,

I am writing you today as a parent in full support of House Bill 0736: School Construction – Local Cost-Share – Alterations. Passage of this bill before you is an absolute imperative for Kent County Public Schools, its students and staff, and my community.

My wife and I have two sons, the older is a third-grader at Henry Highland Garnet Elementary School and is possibly on his way to being an astrophysicist and the younger will be a first-grader at Garnet next year and hopes to specialize in veterinary medicine for injured endangered sea turtles, or as he calls it "a turtle doctor."

Something a lot of people don't realize about Kent County — we have only five public schools. Three elementary schools, a middle school and a high school.

So we have only one middle school serving all families in Kent County. And the building is old and failing. We don't have the same option as families in Maryland's metropolitan areas who can opt for a different middle school nearby or enter a lottery for a coveted high-performing school in the same city or county.

If my wife and I choose to send our children to a different middle school when the time comes, it will be either at great expense to us for private school tuition or by leaving the community that is our home and finding jobs elsewhere.

Either choice is also detrimental to our school system. We would be another family contributing to declining enrollment, and the state and county funding to Kent County Public Schools would decrease as a result.

More so, I don't want to move. My family doesn't want to move. And we shouldn't have to.

The state funding formula was created with the best intentions — like all public policy. An issue needed to be addressed. State leaders took charge and created a plan that sought to fix the problem.

But like nearly every one-size-fits-all policy, there are outliers that are actually hurt instead of helped.

The school construction formula shows Kent County to be wealthy. We have a lot of waterfront land, so that tracks. Meanwhile, another formula shows that we have so much poverty among our school population that every child receives free breakfast and lunch and access to various wraparound services such as Community Schools, Judy Centers and Title I resources.

Two things can be true at the same time. In this case, the wrong formula is being applied to our middle school project.

There's no hiding the significant cost for a middle school — especially with only a 50/50 split in state funding — in Kent County's annual budget totaling around \$60 million. Nor is there any way of distributing the cost share equitably among the less than 20,000 people who live in Kent

County. Please think about that for a moment — 20,000 people. You can fit more than three times our entire county population in M&T Bank Stadium.

And we haven't asked the state for a new school in 50 years — while we have tightened and tightened and tightened budgets and closed schools and consolidated roles and added responsibilities all in an effort to keep our schools going.

Please help my community and support HB0736. My children and every other child in Kent County deserve to attend a middle school that would offer them the kind of education Maryland strives to provide for its next generation of leaders in every field.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in purple ink, appearing to read "Daniel Divilio".

Daniel Divilio
ddivilio@kent.k12.md.us
Chestertown