

Testimony in Support of HB0736

02/07/2025

HB0736 School Construction - Local Cost-Share - Alterations

Dear Chairman Barnes and Members of the Appropriations Committee:

I am writing today to express my strong support of bill HB0736 - sponsored by Delegates Jacobs, Ghrist, and Arentz, and Senator Hershey. This bill requests that an adjustment is made for the local cost-share for school construction projections under certain circumstances.

Kent County Middle School serves all of Kent County with a high population of students who qualify for free or reduced price meals. The current state cost share for public school construction for Kent County is designated as 50%, leaving our small county of 22,000 to cover about \$45 million to build a new school. This is about 3/4 of Kent County's entire yearly budget. Unfortunately, we know this project literally cannot happen without an increase in support from the state.

In past years, the state has granted counties in similar situations a much higher percentage of costs. Kent County has 86% of students qualifying for CEP. Caroline County, with 85% CEP, was granted 94% from the state for eligible costs. Wicomico, with 77% CEP, was granted 98% from the state.

Kent County Middle School was built in 1946. That was 79 years ago, the year World War II ended, the same year the world's first general-service computer was introduced to the world.

We cannot expect our children to thrive when they are trying to learn in a building that is almost 80 years old and is crumbling around them. There are leaks in the roof, rooms without windows, and no spaces designed to accommodate and support the pedagogical advancements of the past 80 years. It looks and feels like a bunker. How can our students learn to prepare for the future when their school is a relic of the past?

Our kids and teachers need a new building—one that reflects the fact that we are living in the 21st century. Our community needs this school. But we do not have the funds to pay for it because our county is small and our budgets are as well. It is an injustice of our forward-thinking state to leave Kent County students behind and to continue to forfeit their futures because our county is unable to fund a new school building. Kids deserve a healthy, safe and welcoming school building that inspires learning, no matter where they're from.

Please advocate for our often overlooked and undervalued students by voting favorably on HB0736 to give them the best environment for success.

Sincerely,
John Hughes Facilities Director
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