

March 24, 2025

Support for SB0843 School Construction – Local Cost-Share – Alterations

Dear members of the House Appropriations Committee,

I am writing to you today as a parent in full support of Senate Bill 843: School Construction – Local Cost-Share – Alterations.

SB0843 would help our small community of Kent County — population less than 20,000 — build a new middle school. We're not talking about one new middle school out of a dozen middle schools in our county. We have one middle school serving every public school student in grades six through eight: Kent County Middle School. In fact, we have only five schools in the entire Kent County Public Schools system: three elementary schools, the aforementioned middle school and a single high school.

While all of our buildings are old, and most have served multiple education levels — at least one of our elementary schools has previously been a middle school and, at another time, a high school — Kent County Middle School is in desperate need of replacement.

Built in 1949, Kent County Middle School has not undergone a major renovation in more than 50 years. But our school system is spending hundreds of thousands of dollars in emergency repairs. The middle school closed to students for a day on three separate occasions this year for water and sewer issues. They have had to dig sizeable holes in classroom floors at great expense to get to failing sewer pipes.

I have two elementary-age children. In less than five years, they will be students at Kent County Middle School. As Kent County residents, we don't have the same options as families in more populous counties. We cannot seek to enroll our children in another nearby public middle school or try for a lottery at a high-performing school.

My oldest son is a high-achieving third-grader who already talks about astrophysics and and his younger brother wants to specialize in veterinary medicine for injured endangered sea turtles, or as he puts it: "be a turtle doctor."

Our options if we don't feel the Kent County Middle School building can provide our children with the education they deserve — that all of their classmates deserve — is to uproot our family and move out of the community our boys have known their whole lives or enroll in a costly private school.

On paper, one set of statistics makes Kent County look wealthy. But another set of figures shows that our student population is very poor with every child receiving free breakfast and lunch and access to various wraparound services such as Community Schools, Judy Centers and Title I resources.

This bill takes into consideration that Kent County is an outlier in the state's school construction funding formulas. Even with the per capita wealth that we show in our overall tax base, we don't have the population density to generate the requisite local revenue for a building project on the scale of a new Kent County Middle School.

As a result of this funding disparity, Kent County has not built in a new school in half a century. Between 1973 and 2025 — a 52-year span — Kent County Public Schools has received just \$26.3 in school construction funding from the IAC. The school system received \$6.6 million from 2021 to 2025.

We need additional state funding to build a new middle school. SB0843 will help turn this long-in-the-works project — which has been discussed since before our children were born and is currently being designed — into a reality. And Kent County Public Schools is doing everything it can to cut down on the project costs despite the inherent challenges posed by our small economy of scale.

I urge you to provide SB0843 a favorable recommendation from the House Appropriations Committee and push for its passage in the General Assembly.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Daniel Divilio', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Daniel Divilio
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