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Dear Chair, Vice Chair and Members of the House Appropriations Committee,

I am writing to you today in support of House Bill 0736, School Construction - Local Cost-Share - Alterations.

I am a resident of Kent County and this bill would make it possible for our community to build a new middle school that we desperately need. Currently, the state would split the costs for a new school 50-50 with the county. With construction costs budgeted between \$60 and \$70 million, that is a burden our community of less than 20,000 residents cannot afford.

The state set the 50/50 split because a formula shows Kent County to be very wealthy, but all five of our schools have high rates of poverty. Every student in each of our schools gets free breakfast and lunch because of our poverty rates.

We have one middle school — Kent County Middle School — serving all the children of our county. It opened in 1950 and the maintenance costs we are paying every year is money that would be much better spent on a new building. The building had to be shut down and classes canceled for three days this school year for plumbing issues. When it rains, water leaks in. One room is freezing cold and the next room over is boiling hot. The HVAC system needs to be upgraded to filter air of respiratory pathogens as well. Kent County Middle School's classrooms do not meet the needs of today's students. They are not suitable by today's educational standards.

Our kids deserve better, especially during their middle school years. A new middle school will revive our school system and our local economy.

I urge you to support the passage of House Bill 0736.