

Testimony in Support of SB0843

02/25/2025

SB0843 School Construction - Local Cost-Share - Alterations

Dear Chairman Guzzone and Members of the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee:

I am writing today to express my strong support of bill SB0843 - 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.

I am both a teacher in our county and a parent of a previous middle schooler and current middle school student. As president of Kent County Teachers Association, I was involved in helping staff during several different issues related to workplace health and safety -- primarily related to the lack of staff only bathrooms upstairs because of sewage issues and many respiratory related concerns due to interior classrooms with no windows and an aging HVAC system. KCMS is the first of several school buildings in our system that need to be replaced and have suffered for many years because of this unfair funding and cost-share scenario. As a parent, both of my students have come home to relay information to me about the building and its poor conditions. This year my son has missed three days due to water and plumbing issues. Even now, the area where there has been a "repair" outside of the school still seems in disrepair and has disrupted the sidewalk--making it unsafe for anyone with potential physical limitations.

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 SB0843 to give them the best environment for success.

Sincerely,
Ashlee Langer
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