

Kent County Board of Education

Growing a Community of Leaders

February 28, 2025

The Honorable Guy Guzzone
The Honorable Jim Rosapepe
3 West Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401
Annapolis, MD 21401

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

Dear Chair, Vice Chair and Members of the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee,

I am here today to impress upon you the importance of the passage of Senate Bill 843: School Construction – Local Cost-Share – Alterations. This bill has the full support of the Kent County Board of Education as the means necessary to secure the funding for a new middle school for our community.

This bill ensures the process launched in 2018 to plan to renovate and modernize our school buildings culminates with the capstone project in the Kent County Public Schools Six-Year Facilities Strategic Plan: the construction of a new Kent County Middle School.

Students in Kent County are served by a single middle school, Kent County Middle School, located in the heart of our county seat of Chestertown. The current structure is more than 70 years old and has both serious structural and educational deficiencies as described in the aforementioned facilities plan.

Kent County Public Schools has sought to address the twin challenges of our aging schools and shrinking enrollment by streamlining our operations. It was not that long ago that we closed two elementary schools. Before that, we went from three middle schools to one.

A feasibility study completed in 2023 showed our current middle school building can no longer be maintained through general upkeep. Nor do the myriad additions and reconfigurations of classrooms effectively serve today's students. The feasibility study determined that renovation of the middle school building would prove a less cost-effective use of taxpayer money than replacement.

The current 50/50 cost-share plan for school construction between the state and our county creates a financial burden that our small constituent base — with a total population of less than 20,000 people, a median household income about

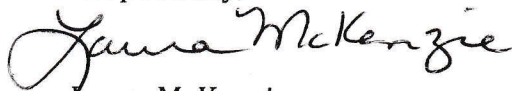
\$27,000 below the state average and all five schools serving areas federally designated as low income — cannot shoulder.

Our district is working with the Maryland Association of Boards of Education on this proposed legislation, and in MABE's statewide association's view, passing this bill would be received favorably by many districts.

A new Kent County Middle School will ensure every student in our community receives the education they need during those very crucial middle school years — the years that see them begin to chart the course toward their college and career ambitions.

For all the children of the Kent County community, please send Senate Bill 843 forward for passage in the General Assembly this session and keep the project to replace Kent County Middle School moving forward.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Laura McKenzie".

Laura McKenzie

Member

Kent County Board of Education