

Good afternoon Chair and Members of the Committee,

My Name is Charlotte Keniston and I am a board member and parent of two elementary-aged children at Watershed Public Charter Elementary-Middle School located in Baltimore County. As a parent, board member, and Maryland taxpayer, I am happy to submit testimony in strong support of HB1430.

My 4th grade son Cole and I spent some time visiting some of your offices in Annapolis with the Charter School Advocacy Day, and during that time I had an opportunity to hear from him and his classmates about some of the real facilities challenges they face every day- broken bathroom stalls, overheated classrooms, and a perpetually broken elevator. Our school building is in a 75+ year old building and as such we also deal with significant challenges related to cooling and heating, lead pipes, and general aging infrastructure. A traditional public school would be housed in a county-owned building and be maintained by individuals employed by the county. In a Charter School, the administrative burden, as well as the cost of procuring, leasing, maintaining, and improving the school and its grounds is up to the school itself and the funding is drawn directly from the school's per-pupil funding. In Traditional schools the per-pupil amount is dedicated solely to teaching and learning, while in a charter school that funding must also cover the high costs of facilities needs. At Watershed, these costs represented 15% of our budget, money that could be spent on instructional materials, additional staff, or enrichment activities.

Charter school students are public school students. My tax dollars fund Baltimore County Public Schools and yet my children receive less benefit than their traditional-school peers. HB1430 provides a path to remedy this equity issue. By providing \$1,600 per charter school student, distributed directly to schools, charter schools will have the ability to maintain and improve their school buildings and grounds, so that the per-pupil funding provided by the state can be used as it is intended– to support student learning. In addition, if the state includes this funding in their budget, it will allow Maryland to have access to 9 million dollars of Federal funding through the State Facilities Incentive Grant (SFIG). By appropriating these funds, Maryland can double its impact for charter schools, without an increase in cost to taxpayers.

In closing, I want to share a few photos of Watershed students, staff, and parents taking care of our beloved school space. Please help us to better steward our space!



Sincerely,

Charlotte Keniston, PhD.  
Watershed Public Charter School Parent and Board Member