

**Testimony of the
Baltimore City Board of School Commissioners
In Opposition of House Bill 1430 –
Maryland Public Charter School Program – School Facilities – Funding**

March 11, 2026

The Baltimore City Board of School Commissioners (the Board) opposes House Bill 1430 because it would carve out school construction funding for a small select group of schools, allowing them to be funded ahead of public schools that may have more serious facility issues. Even though the legislation indicates it would be separate funding, it does not take into account the overall inadequacy of school construction funding for the entire State. This “separate” funding would only pit charter schools against other more needy schools in the State.

As of 2023, the IAC authorizes state funding for improvements in charter schools that are not owned by local school systems, provided they meet certain criteria. In 2023, the Maryland Interagency Commission on School Construction (IAC) adopted a landmark policy allowing state bond proceeds to fund capital improvements for leased public charter school buildings not owned by local school systems. To qualify, the charter school must have a lease of at least 25 years and a written guarantee from the local education agency.

The Baltimore City Public School System currently has 34 charter schools within the City Schools portfolio. Of those 34 schools, many are housed in City Schools owned buildings. As you know, the public school construction program is overseen by the IAC. In its requirements, the IAC receives a list of schools, by priority, from the local school board and the IAC then grades those projects and provides funding based upon available school construction dollars. In making a priority listing in Baltimore City, those charter schools that are housed in Baltimore City Public School System owned buildings are considered for inclusion into the priority list for funding. Those charter schools that are not within City Schools’ buildings have an operator that has the ability to creatively raise funds and work with other organizations to tackle facility issues; that was one of the tradeoffs agreed to during the debate for the passage of the public charter school law.

The Board has always supported the diverse portfolio of traditional schools, Charter schools, Transformation schools and Contract schools within the school district. However, the proposed legislation would impose tremendous cost on City Schools by placing further strain on the already limited facilities funding the district receives. And, even if this is an additional source of school construction funds, solely for charters, it then allows charters to compete against

schools in its own district and possibly receive funds ahead of a school that is in far worse condition.

It is well-established that City Schools faces significant capital needs for the school system's buildings. In addition, City Schools is a district that is regularly closing and merging schools, as well as returning buildings via surplus to the City of Baltimore, because of the inability to adequately support facility needs. The idea of carving out additional state funding for charter school facilities when there is already insufficient funding to support the current facility needs in Baltimore City and around the State creates inequities between charter and traditional schools – both of which are part of the public school system under Maryland law. Even the IAC has testified before the General Assembly that the current funding for public school construction is insufficient to meet the needs of schools and because of this insufficiency of funding, public school buildings are becoming increasingly inadequate.

City Schools estimates that more than \$3.86 billion (in today's dollars) is needed to bring all City Schools school buildings up to minimally acceptable standards through repairs and replacements to the remaining facilities that are still in need of a complete overhaul due to their age and conditions, even after the 21st Century School Buildings Program and the Built to Learn Act of 2020 have been fully implemented.

With the 21st Century School Buildings Program, the school board pays approximately \$20 million dollars, per year, in bond payments in order to support the construction of those newly renovated buildings; \$20 million that could be used for instruction, interventions and other school related teaching expenses. Charter schools have the same ability to seek funding for facility issues from outside entities and pay for those costs. The issue of not receiving facility funding for charters was well discussed during the passage of the Public School Charter law in Maryland. It is well documented when the Public School Charter law passed that the General Assembly had no intention of providing State dollars to charter schools.

Also, given current inflationary pressures on construction costs, there is ample evidence that facility issues with in City Schools is even more concerning and the \$3.86 billion significantly underestimates the full costs of addressing these unmet systemic facility renovation needs, and that even more funding would be required to complete a full portfolio replacement to the educational standards recommended by the IAC, and utilized by other school districts in Maryland and across the nation.

For the foregoing reasons, the Baltimore City Board of School Commissioners opposes House Bill 1430 and urges an unfavorable report.

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