



CHESAPEAKE LIGHTHOUSE FOUNDATION

Lighting The Way For Excellence in Education!

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Good afternoon

My name is Ashish Vadalia, and I serve as the STEM Programs Coordinator for the Chesapeake Lighthouse Foundation, which operates several public charter schools here in Maryland.

My role focuses on building opportunities for students—whether that means robotics programs, engineering labs, research partnerships, or hands-on STEM learning that prepares them for the future. Every day I see students discovering interests that could shape their careers in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics.

But I also see a challenge that many people outside our schools may not realize.

Public charter schools in Maryland receive no dedicated facilities funding. That means our schools must pay rent, maintenance, and building costs directly out of the same operating budgets that support teachers, programs, and classroom materials.

In many cases, that means roughly fifteen percent of a school's budget is spent just keeping the lights on and the doors open.

When schools are forced to divert that much funding to facilities, it limits what we can do for students. It can mean fewer lab resources, fewer technology upgrades, fewer hands-on learning opportunities, and fewer enrichment programs that help students explore fields like engineering, coding, and biotechnology.

Facilities funding would not simply help buildings—it would help students.

It would allow schools to redirect operating dollars back into the classroom. It would give educators more stability to plan long-term STEM initiatives. It would allow us to expand programs that inspire curiosity and innovation.

When students have access to the right spaces—science labs, maker spaces, engineering workshops—they learn differently. They build. They test ideas. They collaborate. They see themselves as future scientists, engineers, and problem solvers.

And for many students, especially those in underserved communities, those opportunities can change the trajectory of their lives.

Facilities funding also supports stability. When schools are financially secure, they can focus on instruction and student growth rather than constantly worrying about how to cover building costs.

At the end of the day, this conversation is not really about buildings or budgets.

It is about whether every public school student—no matter what type of public school they attend—has access to a safe, stable learning environment and the resources needed to succeed.

As educators, our goal is simple: we want every dollar possible focused on students and learning.

Thank you for your time and for your commitment to Maryland's students.

