

The Honorable Ben Barnes
Chair, House Appropriations Committee
House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Re: House Bill 854 – School Construction – Nonpublic Special Education School Renovation Program

Dear Chair Barnes, Vice Chair Kaiser, and Members of the House Appropriations Committee:

My name is Bryon Fracchia, and I am the Executive Director of Nexus-Woodbourne, a Maryland-based nonpublic special education school operating in conjunction with a licensed residential treatment center. On behalf of the students, families, and staff we serve, I respectfully urge a favorable report on House Bill 854.

Organizational Background

Nexus-Woodbourne provides comprehensive educational and therapeutic services to some of Maryland's most vulnerable youth — students who are placed in nonpublic programs under § 8-406 of the Education Article due to significant emotional, behavioral, and mental health needs. Our students require structured, trauma-informed educational environments that integrate academic instruction with residential treatment services.

We are licensed by the appropriate State agencies and provide Department-approved curriculum and high school credit consistent with State graduation requirements.

House Bill 854 establishes the Nonpublic Special Education School Renovation Program, administered by the Interagency Commission on School Construction, to provide targeted capital grants for:

- Classroom and facility renovations
- Residential cottage upgrades to improve student treatment and safety
- Health, safety, and accessibility improvements
- Infrastructure modernization and technology upgrades
- New construction necessary to comply with Department standards

For schools like Nexus-Woodbourne, this legislation addresses a long-standing structural inequity: while public schools have established State capital funding mechanisms,

nonpublic special education schools that serve publicly placed students have limited access to dedicated renovation support.

Why This Funding Is Critical

Students in residential treatment educational settings often present with:

- Complex mental health diagnoses
- Trauma histories
- Safety and behavioral stabilization needs
- Intensive therapeutic support requirements

Outdated facilities can directly impact student safety, therapeutic effectiveness, and educational outcomes. Investments in infrastructure are not cosmetic — they are foundational to:

- Maintaining safe therapeutic spaces
- Complying with evolving health and safety standards
- Providing ADA accessibility
- Supporting modern instructional technology
- Creating secure, trauma-responsive residential environments

When facilities deteriorate or cannot be modernized, the State risks reduced placement capacity and increased long-term costs due to higher-acuity placements elsewhere.

Fiscal Responsibility & Statewide Impact

HB 854 is structured responsibly:

- It allows the Governor to include annual appropriations.
- It authorizes prioritization for health and safety needs.
- It supports schools serving a high percentage of Maryland residents.

Importantly, the students served in these programs are placed and funded by Maryland public school systems. Ensuring that their educational environments are safe, compliant, and modern protects the State's investment and ensures continuity of care.

Nonpublic special education schools serve students whose needs cannot be met in traditional public settings. These students deserve facilities that are safe, therapeutic, and

educationally sound. Establishing this program aligns capital policy with Maryland's commitment to educational equity and student safety.

House Bill 854 is a thoughtful and necessary step toward ensuring that Maryland's most vulnerable students receive education and treatment in safe, modern, and compliant facilities. It creates a structured, accountable capital pathway without mandating automatic expenditures.

For these reasons, Nexus-Woodbourne respectfully requests a favorable report on House Bill 854.

Thank you for your consideration and for your continued commitment to Maryland's children.

Sincerely,

Bryon Fracchia