

UNFAVORABLE – House Bill 1430
Maryland Public Charter School Program – School Facilities – Funding

Senate Budget and Taxation Committee
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Alison Perkins-Cohen
Chief of Staff

Good afternoon, Chair Guzzone, and members of the committee. I am Alison Perkins-Cohen, Chief of Staff for Baltimore City Public Schools, here today in opposition to House Bill 1430.

In addition to serving for the past ten years as Chief of Staff for City Schools, I previously served as the Executive Director of Baltimore City's largest charter operator. I share this to say I have sat in many seats on all sides of this issue and have always taken seriously the responsibility to ensure fair and equitable funding amongst charter and traditional schools alike.

With charter students making up 20% of our City Schools population, we have more charters in Baltimore City than all the other jurisdictions in Maryland combined. We value our charters, are committed to them, and stand ready to serve as a model on how to ensure they flourish.

Unfortunately, the bill before you today seeks to move Maryland away from the core tenets of the Blueprint for Maryland's Future which provides per pupil funding based on student need, and away from the original charter statute's commitment to commensurate funding. HB1430 would establish a per pupil funding allocation – **for charter students only** – to support the maintenance and operations of school facilities despite the fact that no other students in the State receive a per pupil allocation for such costs, nor are there any requirements for review or approval of projects paid for via these funds as required for all LEAs for any funding provided by the IAC.

Despite what may be implied in today's testimony from the bill's proponents, no such allocation currently exists for traditional school students nor is it the case that they don't have such costs. In all our schools, support for maintenance and operations must be pulled from already limited foundation funds. In fact, in Baltimore, the costs of facilities maintenance and operation is already addressed via our funding formula whereby traditional schools receive a per pupil allocation considerably lower than that received by charters in part because the cost of maintaining and operating their facilities is removed before they receive their per pupil while

charter schools already receive a higher per pupil to address this very cost. Facility costs are a challenging reality with which all schools struggle.

To suggest that only a select group of students is deserving of funding to support maintenance and operations of school facilities runs counter to the State's commitment to equity, the principles laid out in the Blueprint and our state's commitment to recognizing charter students as part of our public school ecosystem. If the legislature wishes to establish a new per pupil allocation in recognition of the rising costs of maintenance and operations of school facilities, this must be afforded to all students rather than carving out a select few.

While we appreciate the House's adoption of an amendment that recognizes our unique position in Baltimore City both with our volume of charter schools and the mandate requiring us to close school buildings and make them available to charter schools, we remain opposed to the overarching purpose of the bill, which is to deem one student population as more deserving than another, while diverting critical funds away from prioritized projects that have long been in our queue with the IAC.

To that end, it is important to acknowledge the state's bleak outlook as it relates to school facility funding in general. In a briefing to the House Appropriations Committee earlier this session, the IAC's Executive Director shared alarming statistics on the state's growing school construction needs in contrast to the IAC's funding limitations. Specifically, the cost of construction has doubled in the last 13 years and tripled since 2003, while local state and capital budgets have not increased at anywhere near the same rates. This imbalance has forced school districts to defer needed maintenance and capital work, which only serves to drive down the average condition of school facilities.

In Baltimore City alone, our current maintenance and capital budget is approximately \$375M less than what is needed by industry standards. What's more, our current list of *unfunded* IAC projects totals nearly \$100M – a cost that would be higher had the IAC not requested that LEAs not send so many projects given they were not going to be funded. These are projects we've deemed most pressing across the district – and charter schools are amongst them. Indeed, roughly half of charter schools in Baltimore chose to locate in district buildings and, accordingly, are part of our annual prioritization process. In fact, the only charters who are not part of our district's prioritization process are those who decided not to locate in one of our buildings when offered, often deeming them subpar, and instead opting to pursue private facilities, which come with significant costs that they chose to take on and knew would not be part of City Schools' CIP prioritization process.

Given the tremendous funding gaps that already exist, it is unthinkable to imagine that a select group of students would now divert funds away from students who have waited, often for years,

in a queue of prioritized projects that are awaiting funding. We encourage the committee to preserve our precious but limited existing funds and respectfully urge an unfavorable report of HB1430.