

Dear Delegates,

I am writing to you today as a parent from Chesapeake Public Charter School in Great Mills, MD. I am writing in support of HB1430, as this bill has the potential to be a turning point for our school and other charter schools in Maryland.

I am asking you for the following:

1. Maintain the \$800 per pupil facilities funding level
2. Remove the amendment excluding charter schools in districts that have closed 50 or more schools
3. Ensure Maryland can access up to \$50 Million in federal School Facilities Incentive Grant (SFIG) funding

Right now, Chesapeake Public Charter School stretches every dollar we have to meet our goals, and a significant portion of our operating budget goes toward facility costs that other public schools in our county do not have to fund in the same way. In a very real sense, that means less funding for other educational programs, less for enrichment activities, and less for initiatives that make a real difference in our children's education.

HB1430 changes that by providing dedicated facilities funding. This bill would free up dollars the school can send directly to student programs, grow existing initiatives, expand support services, and create lasting impact. The effects would be immediate and real – increased educational opportunities for Maryland students.

But here's what's truly transformational about this bill: the opportunity doesn't stop at our school doors. As a charter school, we have the unique ability to serve as a model to pilot initiatives, measure what works, and bring those findings back to our broader community. What we build with this additional flexibility can inform and inspire what happens for all students in St. Mary's County. We see ourselves as partners in the larger mission of education in this county, and HB1430 gives us a stronger foundation from which to do that.

The federal State Charter School Facilities Incentive Grant (SFIG) provides up to \$10 million per year for up to five years but it requires a statewide, per-pupil facilities program. The \$800 per-pupil level is what unlocks that federal match. Anything lower leaves Maryland money on the table that we simply cannot afford to forfeit. As education budgets continue to shrink, the matching funds from the federal government become even more important. In St. Mary's County, we are funded 23rd out of 24 counties – this bill can help our school and our county bridge that gap.

At \$800 per pupil, the estimated annual cost to the state is approximately \$20 million. With SFIG matching funds, the effective state share drops to roughly \$10 million per year. This is a cost-effective investment the state can make in public education. HB1430 does not redirect or reduce any existing school construction funding. It creates a new appropriation and increases the IAC budget. Capital Improvement Program funding and all existing school construction dollars remain fully intact. This is new money filling a documented gap, not a reallocation!

The amendment that excludes charter schools in districts that have closed 50 or more schools must be removed. Beyond the fundamental inequity of penalizing our students and families for decisions made at the district level, decisions entirely outside of their control, this exclusion would disqualify Maryland from receiving any SFIG funding at all. The federal program requires a statewide, uniform program with no carve-outs. A partial program means \$0 in federal matching funds. That is not a compromise anyone can afford!

The 540 students at our charter school are public school students. They deserve the same baseline of support as any other child in a Maryland public school. An IAC study found that charter school facilities average 56 years in age, that schools spend up to \$2,400 per pupil on facilities costs, and that up to 40% of operating funds go toward buildings. We are already paying, but this bill would ensure that more of our operating budget can go where it truly belongs — to our students!

HB1430 is a fiscally responsible, equity-driven bill that brings federal dollars to Maryland and gives schools like ours the foundation we need to do more for the students both inside and outside of our building. For Chesapeake Public Charter School, it means more programs, more opportunities, and more impact. For St. Mary's County, it means a proven partner ready to share what works and help lift outcomes for every student in our community.

Thank you for your time, and for considering our students FIRST.

Respectfully,

Katherine L. Dibbern

AFC®, ChFC®, MQFP®, CFP® Candidate & CPCS Parent

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