

Dear Sen. Bailey,

My name is Gary Obenski. I have been a Maryland resident for 46 years and a proud Chesapeake Public Charter School parent for 5. I am writing to urge your **strong** support for HB1430.

Specifically, I am asking you to:

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

As a parent of three (3) children and a husband to a teacher at Chesapeake Public Charter School, I see the everyday attention to education and love for community this school brings to St. Mary's County. The school staff and board are miracle workers, stretching every dollar to give our children the best possible education. However, the strain is real. A huge chunk of our school's budget—money that should be going to our kids—is consumed by building costs. It's a burden that other public schools in our county just don't have to carry in the same way. It means less money for the very things that make a school great: innovative programs, extra help for students who need it, and the kind of enriching experiences that stick with a child for a lifetime.

That's why I'm so excited about HB1430. This bill is a game-changer!

By providing dedicated funding for facilities, HB1430 would finally free up our school's budget to invest directly in our children. New science programs, more arts and music, and the kind of support that ensures every single child can succeed – that's what this bill brings to the table. For my children, and for all our families, the impact of this bill would be immediate and profound.

But what truly inspires me is that this isn't just about our school. Our charter school is a place of innovation and exploration. We have the freedom to try new things, see what works, and share those successes with the entire school system. When you invest in us, you're investing in every student in St. Mary's County. We want to be a partner in making our county's schools the best they can be, and HB1430 gives us the solid ground we need to do that.

There's also a practical, financial side to this that we just can't ignore. This bill would make Maryland eligible for a federal grant that could bring up to \$10 million a year to our state for school facilities. But to get that money, we need a statewide program. The proposed \$800 per-pupil funding is the key that unlocks that federal match. To go any lower would be to leave money on the table—money our kids desperately need.

At an estimated cost of about \$20 million a year, which drops to just \$10 million with the federal match, this is one of the smartest investments Maryland can make in our children's future. And let me be clear: this is *new* money. It doesn't take a single dollar away from any other school construction project. That's why the proposed amendment to exclude some charter schools is deeply concerning.

It's fundamentally unfair to punish our children for district-level decisions they had nothing to do with. Beyond that, it would disqualify our state from receiving any of the federal matching funds. A partial program means we get nothing. That's a compromise that hurts everyone.

The 540 students at our charter school are public school students. They are *Maryland* students. They deserve the same support as any other child in our public school system. Studies have shown that charter schools are often in older buildings and that a huge portion of their budgets goes to just keeping the lights on. We are already paying our share; this bill simply ensures that more of that money goes where it belongs: to our students.

HB1430 is a common-sense, fiscally responsible bill that will bring federal dollars to Maryland and give schools like ours the resources we need to do even more for our kids. For my family, it means more opportunities and a brighter future. For St. Mary's County, it means a stronger partner in education, ready to help lift every student in our community.

I urge our lawmakers to pass this vital piece of legislation.

Very Respectfully Submitted,

Gary B. Obenski
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