

HB1430 – SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENTS

Maryland Public Charter School Program – School Facilities – Funding

Dear Chair and Members of the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee,

I am writing to you as a concerned mother and community member in Maryland to earnestly advocate for your support of HB1430, emphasizing two critical considerations: sustaining the per-pupil funding level at \$800 and eliminating the amendment that unjustly excludes certain charter schools based on district-level school closures.

It is essential to recognize that public charter school students are, in fact, public school students. However, unlike their counterparts in district-operated schools, charter schools frequently face the burden of covering expenses associated with rent, maintenance, utilities, and facility costs - expenses that are typically funded through classroom budgets. This disparity creates a significant and persistent inequity in educational funding.

The proposed \$800 per-pupil funding level is not only equitable but also fiscally prudent. Based on current enrollment figures, this would translate to an estimated annual cost of around \$20 million. Importantly, the successful passage of this bill would enable Maryland to tap into the federal State Charter School Facilities Incentive Grant (SFIG), which can provide up to \$10 million per year for five consecutive years. With this federal match, the effective annual cost for the state would decrease to approximately \$10 million.

To put this funding into perspective, this amount is markedly less than the expense associated with a single new school construction project funded by the Interagency Commission on School Construction (IAC), which often exceeds \$40 million. Moreover, this bill does not divert or diminish existing school construction funding. Instead, it establishes a new, dedicated appropriation and enhances the IAC budget to facilitate the program's administration.

Additionally, it is paramount to remove the amendment that excludes charter schools in districts that have closed 50 or more schools. This provision fosters inequity among public school students and undermines the overarching mission of a statewide program. More critically, the SFIG funding necessitates a uniform facilities program across the state. Exclusion of any group of charter schools jeopardizes Maryland's eligibility for these federal funds, which could lead to a potential loss of up to \$50 million over the next five years.

Ultimately, this bill represents a sensible, balanced approach. It offers modest, reliable support to public charter schools, ensures that more funding is directed to classrooms, and positions Maryland to leverage substantial federal resources that could otherwise benefit other states.

I respectfully urge the Committee to support HB1430, maintaining the \$800 per-pupil funding level, and to remove the exclusion amendment to guarantee equitable treatment for all public school students while allowing Maryland to fully access available federal funding.

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration.

Sincerely,

Myriam Frederick, LMSW

Upper Marlboro, Prince George's County