



CHESAPEAKE LIGHTHOUSE FOUNDATION

Lighting The Way For Excellence in Education!

6151 Chevy Chase Drive Laurel, MD 20707 P: (301) 776-2300 F: (240) 547-2571

March 6th, 2023

To: Budget and Taxation Committee

Re: Favorable Testimony SB0646

Dear Members of the Budget and Taxation Committee,

As a constituent and CEO of the largest charter school operator in Maryland, I ask you to support SB0646 [School Construction - Public Charter School Facility Fund - Establishment](#) sponsored by Senator McCray. Thank you for the work you are already doing to support high-quality public education options for all students in our state.

As former teacher, school principal and current leader of six highly successful charter schools with an enrollment of over 3,600 students I can attest to the need for resources in the charter school community, especially for school facilities. All six of our locations are majority-minority schools and are making great strides in closing the achievement gap for all student populations. All our teachers are proud members of the Maryland State Education Association and the local bargaining unit.

Maryland spends billions of dollars on school facilities every year and charter schools do not receive any capital funding although they represent 3% of the student population. If approved and fully funded, this bill would only cost \$48 million to the state. This would provide charter school students with high-quality, public-school facilities.

Maryland public charter schools are an integral part of the public-school portfolio in Maryland, serving more than 24,000 students statewide —the majority of whom are low-income and students of color—with the opportunity to achieve academically at high levels and launch bright futures. I ask you to support and prioritize SB0646 so that the next generation of youth in our state have access to the opportunities they deserve in safe and high-quality facilities.

Here are a few key data points:

- 1) Studies show that charter schools deliver outstanding educational options to students nationwide and particularly to students from low-income backgrounds. For example, a 2020 study from Harvard University found greater academic gains for student cohorts in charter schools, with the difference amounting to almost an additional half year of learning. Black students and students from low-income backgrounds made the greatest gains.
- 2) A 2022 survey from The Harris Poll found broad public support for charter schools: 93% of parents agree that one size doesn't fit all in education, 84% of parents agree that charter schools should be available to families, and 83% of parents agree that education has become a more political issue to them than it was in the past.



- 3) Charter schools on average spend \$2,000 per child on facilities out of their per pupil allocations, which are meant for instruction and other support services.
- 4) Most states with charter schools provide some form of facilities funding to charter schools. The District of Columbia provides \$3,200 dollars per child for charter school facilities. Maryland does not provide any capital funding to charter schools.
- 5) One of the unforeseen consequences of the Maryland Blueprint funding is that it will decrease funding for a number of charter schools starting in 2025. The fact that charter schools are already underfunded by 15 to 20% due to lack of facilities funding may lead to the closure of some of the best charter schools as a result of Blueprint funding cuts. This bill would ensure equitable and sustainable funding for all schools.

The last few years have been challenging, but charter schools are committed to delivering the very best education to students and serving as an essential resource for our state.

As you continue to make needed investments in education, I ask you to support \$48M for SB0646 [School Construction - Public Charter School Facility Fund - Establishment](#) and communicate your support. I know that we are all united behind the same goal to ensure all students are provided with equal access to high-quality, public education options.

Sincerely,

Yilmaz Zayn Ak, Ed.S.

Chief Executive Officer

Chesapeake Lighthouse Foundation

6151 Chevy Chase Dr. Laurel, MD 20707

T. (301) 776.2300

Website: CLFMD.ORG