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Charles and Prince George's Counties

Appropriations Committee
Subcommittee

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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Sponsor Testimony in Support of HB1390
Public Schools – Public School Construction – Funding and Administration
Delegate Kevin M. Harris
Tuesday, March 26, 2024

As we have seen time and again, schools have become targets for violence. Both nationally and statewide, schools are seeing rising levels of violence. In one Maryland school district, there has been a 65% increase in “serious incidents” as reported by school officials. In an anonymous violence reporting line for a Maryland school district, calls and reported tips have increased by nearly 50%.

Violence in our schools impacts our schools and community stakeholders. With increasing violence, students and staff are taken away from educational opportunities. Even when violence isn’t directly affecting our communities, the perceived threat of violence is enough to spark fear and anxiety. School psychologists report that nearly 25% of students in Maryland report feeling depressed and 20% of students have symptoms of anxiety. The consequence of violence in schools is the establishment of barriers to educational advancement.

Innocent children and educators now rely on school safety grant programs for their protection. Grant programs provide funding to school systems to improve school security. These measures, like secure and lockable classroom doors, safe refuge areas in classrooms, and surveillance technology, are common sense and practical. Amid today’s culture, they are also becoming more common. In U.S. school systems, 97% of schools have monitored/controlled access to entrances and exits. And 91% of school systems use security cameras to monitor schools. Despite the need to increase security measures in Maryland schools, the essential \$10,000,000 of funding is set to expire on June 30, 2026.

This \$10,000,000 is marked exclusively for the use of school security measures. Without this funding, many school systems will not be able to afford the cost of equipment and upgrades. A single low-end camera can cost up to \$1,000 while a high-resolution camera can cost \$8,000. One study on the cost of school security technologies estimates that the total cost of adding cameras to a high school could be up to \$200,000. The research further specifies that this estimate does not include the associated costs such as electricity. Without the necessary funding, individual school districts will be forced to decide between education and safety.

The removal of the grant deadline on the School Safety Program reflects a commitment to both school safety and education. By providing schools with access to funding, they need to ensure their students, staff, and faculty are safe, we free up necessary funding that can otherwise be used for educational priorities.

As recent history shows us, Maryland schools are no longer isolated from violent threats. Our most precious and important asset, our children, need our protection. It is time to take action. It is time that essential funding for commonsense measures is not inhibited by a deadline. For these reasons, I respectfully request a favorable report of HB1390 with the amendments adopted in the House.