



Maryland Education Coalition

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Testimony for Senate Bill 611 – Healthy School Facility Fund

Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee

SUPPORT

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The Maryland Education Coalition (MEC) is made up of individuals and statewide organizations, who represent parents, civil rights, and special population groups. We advocate for adequate, equitable funding and systematic accountability for the nearly 900,000 public school students in Maryland’s public schools regardless of their academic, cultural, economic, geographic, racial or other demographic status.

MEC is urging you to support SB611 – Healthy School Facility Fund. According to the state’s Interagency Committee on School Construction, public school buildings in Maryland are getting older. In 2005, the average age of Maryland school buildings were about 25 years old’s. Today, they are nearly 30 years old.

As more facilities approach the end of their lifecycle, more emergencies will occur. During the cold snap this year, many aging heating systems faltered in schools statewide, especially in Baltimore City where students missed several days of school. In some schools, students had to wear winter coats in certain classrooms due to uneven heat and faulty radiators. Students also miss days due to the lack of air conditioning and poor indoor air quality, which exacerbates symptoms for students and teachers with asthma.

Old and deficient school buildings also have other hazards that can be harmful to those that spend most of their week in them. Buildings that have cracks and structural problems in the roof or foundation can lead to an increase in dampness and moisture -- conditions that allow for mold growth and further damage to the school.

SB611 is a step in the right direction to ensure that emergency repairs can be made to keep the heat and air condition working and mitigate harmful conditions such as mold. However, given that many billions are needed to address critical school facility issues statewide, MEC urges the committee to consider increasing the amount of funding in this bill. Further, MEC urges the committee to ensure that this funding program addresses all emergency facility issues beyond temperature control and mold. Projects that would remove harmful materials such as asbestos and PCBs should also be eligible for funding in this program.

No child in Maryland should attend an unhealthy or unsafe school building. MEC urges the committee to give SB611 a favorable report. However, in order to reduce the number of facility-related emergencies that occur, the state legislature must also work to develop a comprehensive CIP program to ensure that schools are being rebuilt or fully renovated in a timely manner. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Prepared by Frank Patinella, Senior Education Advocate, ACLU of the Maryland