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**House Appropriations Committee
Testimony on House Bill 860:
Baltimore City Public Schools Construction Authority Funding
March 5, 2013**

Sound school facilities are critical to education. When a child is in a school without proper air, heat, potable drinking water, ability to access the internet and no functional science labs, we cannot expect them to excel academically.

Many schools in Baltimore City are in terrible condition and given the Band-Aid approach to school construction in the city and the limited local wealth and inflexible state dollars, it would take 50 years to improve all the current infrastructure not to mention the needs that have yet to be surfaced. That means generations of children in our state will not have the school buildings they need to achieve.

HB 860 provides consistent and flexible school construction dollars that will allow an approved authority to enter into alternative financing that will provide the funds needed to carry out a well-developed 10-year plan laid out by the Baltimore City Public School (BCPS) system. This bold plan was developed in excruciating detail and includes new buildings, renovations, consolidation and closures of dozens of schools.

ACY is a statewide children's advocacy organization and continues to make sure all children across Maryland have access to classroom and infrastructure funding. In order to hold harmless other jurisdictions, HB 860 asks for a block grant that is equal to the average of what the city has been received over the past five years including during the worst economic recession since the 1930's. The city is not asking for more than its current share, it is just asking to use it in a more efficient manner. To ensure integrity of the dollars, an authority either new or existing will be utilized to ensure broad input and oversight of the funds.

The legislative delegations, the mayor, city council, the school system, parents, students and advocates have come together to prioritize the children of Baltimore and ensure that school buildings meet 21st century needs. HB 860 allows current funding to be used in a smarter way that will rebuild Baltimore schools in 10 years rather than 50. Our children cannot wait.

ACY encourages a favorable report on House Bill 860.

