

BALTIMORE CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

BALTIMORE CITY BOARD OF SCHOOL COMMISSIONERS

**Testimony of
Dr. Andres Alonso, CEO
Of the Baltimore City Public School System
In Support of
House Bill 860 – Baltimore City Public School
Construction Authority
House Bill 1249 – Baltimore City –
School Construction – Block Grant
House Bill 194 – Baltimore City – School Facilities – Funding
Before the
House Appropriations Committee**

March 5, 2013

Thank you Chairman Conway, Vice Chairman Proctor and members of the House Appropriations Committee. We are here today to testify in support of House Bills 860, 1249 and 194. All of these pieces of legislation are necessary to allow Baltimore City Public Schools to resurrect its school facilities.

House Bill 194 is the legislation that will amend the Baltimore City Charter to allow the City of Baltimore to place funds received from the beverage container tax, video lottery terminals and table games into a fund dedicated to school construction.

House Bills 860 and 1249 (both identical but for the titles) both allow the school system to receive its current school funding in a block grant to allow the school district to help itself and rebuild and replace its old building stock. As you know, Baltimore City has the oldest building stock in the State.

We are at a critical juncture for City Schools. Our students, teachers and schools have been making remarkable progress over the past five years. The dropout rate in our high schools has dropped by over 60%, while graduation rates have reached their highest historical levels and achievement levels have risen among every grade level and subgroup.

But the buildings where our students learn are an obstacle to their continued progress. We know from research, from experience and from common sense that school buildings that are old and in poor condition have a detrimental effect of student achievement and



teacher retention. Our students need and deserve schools that are designed for today's technology, have state of the art science labs, comfortable learning temperatures at all times of the year, good air quality, and natural lighting.

The legislation the committee is considering takes a major step forward to the goal articulated by our Board of School Commissioners, that all of our students should be learning in 21st century buildings in 10 years. We are grateful to the many partners in Baltimore and here in Annapolis, including those on this panel, members of this committee, The Governor, the Lt. Governor Brown, President Miller, and Speaker Busch, and many others who have understood the seriousness of the need and have indicated a commitment to doing what's right for our kids.

Since this Committee heard the City Schools 10 Year Plan in January, we have received a great deal of helpful suggestions and detailed ideas about how to implement this plan. We have been listening. We appreciate very much the spirit of collaboration in which these have been offered, and we have taken this feedback seriously. For example, the legislation as introduced calls for a new independent authority. We heard suggestions from a number of places that we explore the Maryland Stadium Authority as an entity with a skill-set and experience that could be helpful in getting great school buildings built efficiently. So we have been in conversations with the MSA and have asked them to explore this potential relationship. We have already conducted a tour of schools with MSA and held several in-depth discussions and are continuing to work through how their involvement might work. We expect this collaboration to be solidified shortly and we will have amendments to the exiting legislation.

It has been remarkable how many people here in Annapolis and across the State recognize this is a moment of possibility, unique both because of the dire situation of many of our buildings, because of the hard fought gains that our schools have made, and because of the impact of those gains for the health of Baltimore City and for our number 1 ranked state educational system. There is a broad recognition that this is a smart time to undertake such an effort in terms of interest rates and construction costs. And there is a broad sense that a new approach is necessary, and that the approach to building schools outlined in the legislation is both feasible, practical and sensible.

We look forward to continuing to work with you and urge a **favorable** report on House Bill 194, 860 and 1249.