



HB1370 - Baltimore City – Public School Construction – Bonds and Supplemental Memorandum of Understanding

Testimony for the House Appropriations Committee
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Position: SUPPORT

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The ACLU of Maryland asserts that public school buildings must be healthy, safe, and equipped to support a rigorous 21st century curriculum to ensure that students receive a "thorough and efficient" education, as guaranteed by the state constitution. Given that Baltimore City has the oldest and most deficient school buildings in the state, the ACLU strongly supports HB1370, which would provide \$30 million annually to the city's 21st Century Schools Program. With this revenue, the Maryland Stadium Authority can leverage an estimated \$450-500 million in bonds to fully renovate or rebuild another 10-15 schools in Baltimore.

Background. It was nine years ago when the ACLU published the report, "*Buildings for Academic Excellence: A Vision and Options to Address Baltimore City's Deficient School Facilities*", which brought attention to the widespread deterioration and unhealthy physical conditions in Baltimore's schools. The report also proposed an innovative structure to finance and manage a large-scale school construction program for Baltimore to rebuild dozens of schools on a short timeline. City parents, students, teachers, and community advocates rallied behind the proposal and gained support from the city school system and city elected officials. With the support of this committee and many other state lawmakers, HB860 was passed in 2013, establishing Baltimore's 21st Century Schools Program.

Baltimore City School Construction Making Unprecedented Progress.

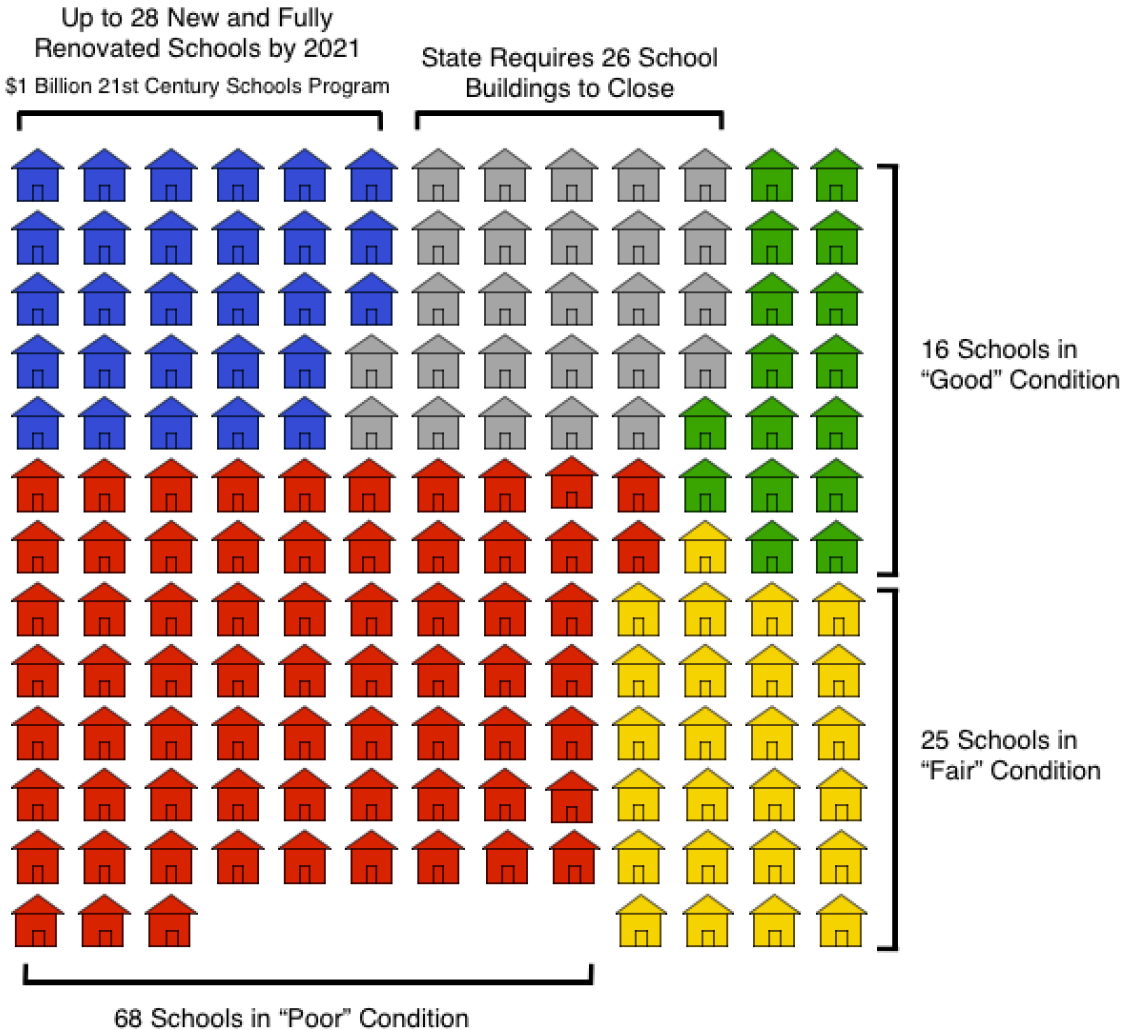
Baltimore City's \$1 billion 21st Century Schools Program is well underway – 9 newly built and fully renovated schools have opened to date and 19 more are in design or started construction. It has been decades since Baltimore has seen school infrastructure improvements on a large scale. And parents, students, teachers, and community members are thrilled and inspired about the new school buildings and what they represent for the future of the city. The City has also invested capital dollars around the new schools to improve sidewalks, lighting, parks and green spaces.

Current Conditions of City School Buildings.

While the 21st Century Schools Program is making significant progress, Baltimore City school buildings remain in a state of crisis due to previous decades of underfunding. Last winter, heating systems in half of the city's school buildings failed, which caused students to miss a week of learning. The lack of air conditioning in half of Baltimore's schools led to missed school days as well.

In 2012, only 16 of 163 schools in Baltimore were rated in "good" condition based on an engineering report. The vast majority of schools were rated in "poor" condition. Along with heating and cooling deficiencies, most building structures like roofs and other mechanical systems such as fire alarms and elevators are beyond their useful life. Water fountains have been turned off due to high lead content. And beyond the health and safety issues, city school buildings received a failing grade for "educational adequacy" — this speaks to how well the facilities support the academic curriculum. Modern science labs, computers, library/media centers, and CTE spaces are desperately needed to support teaching and learning in the 21st century. Without state support, these buildings will continue to deteriorate as the City's fiscal capacity is greatly limited.

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Source: State of School Facilities, Baltimore City Public Schools, Jacobs Engineering, June 2012; Annual Report on the Progress of Replacements, Renovations, and Maintenance of Baltimore City Public Schools, 21st Century School Buildings Program, January 15, 2016

Local Effort and Limited Capacity. Despite being challenged with widespread poverty, Baltimore City and the city school system have put forth significant effort to address its school infrastructure crisis. Of the \$60 million in annual revenue dedicated to the 21st Century Schools Program, local contributions account for \$40 million, or 2/3 of the program. The state pays for the other 1/3 of the program. To meet the local contribution mandated by law, Baltimore City Council passed a 5-cent beverage container tax, which residents begrudgingly supported despite having the highest taxed

district in the state. The city school system is also contributing funds from its operating budget to meet its financial responsibility for the program. No other school system in Maryland has to spend money intended for classroom staff and resources on capital school construction. To expand the 21st Century Schools Program under HB1370, the City will have to put forth even more effort to meet the local cost share.

Baltimore City's school buildings still have a long way to go to catch up to its county neighbors, but the 21st Century Schools Program has proven that it is feasible. The ACLU applauds the state for this unprecedented collaboration with the City, city school system, and the Maryland Stadium Authority, which has proven that a seemingly insurmountable problem can be solved through innovation, political will, and compassion.

The ACLU is asking this committee to give a favorable report for HB1370 to ensure that the vision of new and modern schools becomes a reality for many more thousands of Baltimore City students and families.