



# ACLU Education Advocate

May 2008

## In This Issue:

- Annapolis 2008 Highlights: How Education Issues Fared
- No Further Cuts to State Funding
- School Construction Funds Increase
- Additional Legislative Highlights

## Annapolis 2008 Highlights: How Education Issues Fared

ACLU's Education Reform Project worked with education coalition partners to ensure that public education did not suffer additional budget cuts in the 2008 session, to protect the Governor's budget for school construction/renovation, to pass positive measures to reduce student suspensions and truancy, to expand pre-K, and to advocate on other bills affecting at-risk schoolchildren. We sincerely thank parents and advocates who joined us to testify and others that called and emailed their legislators.

## No Further Cuts to State Funding

**BRIDGE TO EXCELLENCE FUNDING** After \$150 million in reductions to mandated funding for public schools in fiscal 2009 during the special session, a top priority for our Education Reform Project in the 2008 session was to ensure no additional reductions to public school funding.

A key component to the Bridge to Excellence funding formula is an adjustment based upon the differences in the cost of living and provision of educational services among counties in the state. This adjustment has not been funded in previous years. Fiscal 2009 represents the first installment of funding, with \$76 million in the fiscal 2009 budget allocated to jurisdictions throughout the state based upon the cost of education in those jurisdictions.

## School Construction Funds Increase

**PROTECT AGING SCHOOLS PROGRAM** A top priority of our Education Reform Project was ensuring full funding, including increases due to inflation, for this critical program. The Aging Schools Program funds critically needed maintenance projects that ensure basic safe and habitable school buildings, such as remedying damaged roofs and failed heating and air systems, which do not qualify for school construction funds. State funding for this program was cut in half in the fiscal 2008 budget. Then, the House during the special session and during the 2008 session voted to reduce mandated inflation funding by cutting almost \$300,000. ACLU organized Baltimore parents and the state PTA to resist cuts. With help from the Senate, full funding was restored in the final fiscal 2009 budget.

**MAINTAIN SCHOOL CONSTRUCTION FUNDING** ACLU of Maryland continued advocacy for full funding of school construction as called for by the Kopp Task Force and the Public Schools Facilities Act of 2004. Fiscal year 2009 will see another year of record funding for school construction after years of neglect under the prior administration. ACLU of Maryland thanks Governor O'Malley for prioritizing school construction funding in his budget proposal and thanks the General Assembly and budget committees for working with the Governor to locate an additional \$27.4 million for a final school construction appropriation of \$327.4 million. Because the demand still outstrips the funding available, facility funding will continue to need strong support.

**SCHOOL FACILITIES SURVEY OVERDUE** In order to ensure that school construction funding is distributed fairly and is effectively addressing the state's critical need for both new buildings for growing student populations and adequate old buildings that do not pose serious safety and health threats, the state was required to complete an updated survey of school buildings in 2007. This long overdue survey has not been completed and was the subject of ACLU of Maryland advocacy during the legislative session. Proposed mechanisms for funding the survey were rejected. With unprecedented levels of critically needed school construction funding, oversight and accountability is as important as ever.

## Additional Legislative Highlights

**POSITIVE SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS & TEACHERS** ACLU supported bills that addressed student truancy with positive behavioral interventions, as opposed to punitive sanctions, and established a task force to study multiple suspensions of students. HB 285/ SB 96 will require schools with a high truancy rate (adjusted downward until schools with 1% truancy are covered) to implement research-based staff training programs that will create positive school environments. Thanks to lead sponsors Delegate Kaiser and Senator Pugh and bill supporters. HB 139 establishes a task force to study the issue of students who have been suspended multiple times (see also School-to-Prison Pipeline section).

**HIGH SCHOOL ASSESSMENTS STILL A DIPLOMA REQUIREMENT** Bills that addressed, in various ways, the requirement that students pass four High School Assessments to receive a high school diploma did not move from committee. ACLU has raised issues about this requirement, citing concern about whether students have been adequately prepared for the tests, with adequate schools and qualified teachers. The ball now moves to the State Board of Education, which will likely address whether the diploma requirement should be delayed.

**EXPAND PRE-KINDERGARTEN** ACLU has long supported public pre-Kindergarten programs for at-risk three- and four-year-olds. The current Thornton mandate requires that all 4-year-olds from low-income families be offered public school pre-K. HB1319, sponsored by Delegate Hucker, and SB912, sponsored by Senator Dyson, would have expanded pre-K to serve children of military families. The bills' fiscal notes, though not large, were enough to block passage in a year with concerns about the deficit and economy.

## Education Reform Project Staff

Bebe Verdery, Education Reform Director  
410.889.8550 x 106  
[verdery@aclu-md.org](mailto:verdery@aclu-md.org)

JaCina Stanton, Education Reform Advocate  
410.889.8550 x 134  
[stanton@aclu-md.org](mailto:stanton@aclu-md.org)

Frank Patinella, Education Reform Advocate  
410.889.8550 x 123  
[patinella@aclu-md.org](mailto:patinella@aclu-md.org)

American Civil Liberties Union of Maryland | 3600 Clipper Mill Road, Suite 350 | Baltimore, MD 21211  
410.889.8555 (o) | 410.366.7838 (f) | [patinella@aclu-md.org](mailto:patinella@aclu-md.org) | [www.aclu-md.org](http://www.aclu-md.org)



