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BILL: Senate Bill 172
TITLE: Public Charter School Facility Fund
DATE: February 26, 2019
POSITION: OPPOSE
COMMITTEE: Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs
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Senate Bill 172 establishes the Public Charter School Facility Fund as a special, nonlapsing fund; specifying that the Fund shall be used to provide funding to public charter schools in the State to acquire, plan, develop, finance, construct, improve, repair, and maintain public charter school facilities; requiring the State Department of Education to administer the Fund; requiring the Governor to appropriate a certain amount to the Fund each year; requiring the Department to establish certain procedures for schools to request funds; etc.

PSSAM opposes Senate Bill 172

The Public Charter School Act of 2003 created Maryland's public charter school program "to establish an alternative means within the existing public school system in order to provide innovative learning opportunities and creative educational approaches to improve the education of students." More than 50 charter schools have been approved and are operating in several local school systems.

PSSAM is supportive of the concept of charter schools. We believe that local board authorizing control is key to the fact that Maryland's charter schools have not experienced the financial or academic failures seen in other states. That being said, PSSAM strongly opposes Senate Bill 172 which would create the Public Charter School Facility Fund to provide funding on an annual basis to charter schools to acquire, plan, develop, construct, lease, improve, repair, and maintain Maryland's charter school facilities.

PSSAM believes that it is critical for local school systems to provide all of our public school students with school facilities conducive to learning. We also believe providing a quality system of education must include providing safe, high quality school facilities in which all students can learn. We are grateful that Maryland's school construction program addresses the critical needs of schools with the greatest relative deficiencies, including facility conditions, capacity, and educational functionality. However, our needs far exceed the amount of funding currently provided. We strongly advocate that state funding must support all 1,200 of our public schools in all 24 school systems with approved construction, renovation, and systemic projects before funding is provided to the 50 charter schools in 6 local school systems.

For the reasons stated above, PSSAM opposes Senate Bill 172 and requests an unfavorable committee report.