



Howard County Council Public Hearing: Council Bill 42-2019

September 18, 2019

Testimony

Good evening Council Chair Rigby and Council Members. I am testifying tonight on behalf of ACS and its over 160 member organizations and community advocates.

ACS fully understands the challenge that the County faces in meeting the need for additional funds for new construction, renovation and maintenance of our public schools. While we are not opposed to an increase in the school facilities surcharge in concept, we do oppose Council Bill 42-2019 as written.

Without an exemption for the development of affordable housing, the 500% increase in the School Facilities Surcharge has the potential to reduce or eliminate the construction of urgently needed affordable and moderate-income housing. Increased fees will ultimately increase the cost of development. We already face a shortfall of over 5,500 units affordable to people making less than 60% of Howard County's median income – a significant part of our workforce. This shortage will be exacerbated without a clear exemption for its development.

ACS would also suggest that other funding options be considered particularly since, with the restrictions imposed by APFO, funds generated by this fee are likely very limited. The majority of new students to HCPSS are generated by resales, not new home sales. An increase in the transfer tax rate and changes in how this tax is allocated would be a legitimate source of funding for school construction and renovation.

All residents – new and existing – who buy or rent in Howard County benefit from our quality schools. All should contribute to maintaining this quality.

ACS encourages you to reconsider this surcharge as it is currently structured. Given that it would not go into effect until July 1, 2020, there would seem to be time to rethink this bill.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you this evening.

Respectfully submitted,

Joan Driessen

Executive Director