

May 7, 2002

The Honorable Casper R. Taylor, Jr.
Speaker of the House
State House
Annapolis MD 21401

Dear Mr. Speaker:

In accordance with Article II, Section 17 of the Maryland Constitution, I have today vetoed House Bill 937 – Education – Public School Facilities.

As introduced, House Bill 937 would have increased the State share of school construction funds for any school in which more than 50% of the students in the school are eligible for free and reduced price meals under federal law. The bill, sponsored by Delegate Michael E. Busch, was an effort to provide an incentive for local school systems to address the disparity in the condition of schools in poorer neighborhoods when compared with schools in wealthier neighborhoods at the local level. As amended and passed by the House of Delegates, the bill created a Task Force to Study Public School Facilities. The Task Force was charged to examine the issue that was raised in the bill as introduced, and other issues related to the State's public school construction program, including the continuation of the Aging Schools Program.

As amended by the Senate on the final weekend of the 2002 Session of the General Assembly, the bill created the Task Force and codified a formula for distributing funds under the Aging Schools Program, at the request of the Public School Construction Program. Prior to the inclusion of this formula in House Bill 937, funds for the Aging Schools Program had been distributed according to codified, specific dollar amounts for each local jurisdiction. The House concurred in the Senate amendments on sine die.

My decision to veto House Bill 937 is based on two concerns. The first is a concern for the impact of the formula on many jurisdictions, small and large, across the State. The second is rooted in the complex, contentious and practical history of K-12 education funding over the past 8 years. A brief historical review is helpful to understanding these concerns.

In most communities, and for most elected officials, a quality K-12 education system is the highest priority. Working together, we have increased the base budget for K-12 education by over \$1.2 billion since I took office. Developing a consensus for increased education funding has never been a challenge. But beneath the surface of that consensus, there have always been competing ideas regarding how to allocate those increased dollars. The debate has centered on the role of sound management versus increased funding; the effectiveness of various programs and instructional methods; and the unique needs of local school systems in our diverse State. These competing interests have been clearly on display in every Session of the General Assembly since 1997. In every major education funding initiative since 1997, we have seen a similar pattern. Legislation is introduced to address a specific concern or problem. The legislation is amended (and funding is increased) to address issues that are important to elected officials, members of the education community and local school systems. In