

the end, the result is positive – increased funding for Maryland's children.

The Aging Schools Program was created in 1997 by Senate Bill 795 (Chapter 105 of the Acts of 1997). Senate Bill 795 was introduced to settle long-standing litigation between the State and various parties concerning the Baltimore City public school system. The settlement agreement, and the legislation, provided \$230 million to the City schools over a 5-year period. This increased funding created a concern, and ultimately an opportunity, for other local subdivisions. In the course of the legislative process, Senate Bill 795 was amended to provide additional funds through existing and newly created programs for other subdivisions in Maryland. The programs that were chosen to receive an increase, the newly created programs and the amounts of additional funding were directly related to the unique needs of local school systems. All of the funding in the bill was scheduled to sunset after fiscal year 2002.

The Aging Schools Program was allocated \$4.3 million by Chapter 105. The funds were distributed, by specific amount, to each local jurisdiction in the State. The basis for the distribution was the amount of pre-1960 square footage in each jurisdiction, as of April 1995. House Bill 937 establishes a formula relying on data that was updated in February 2002.

In 1998, the General Assembly enacted legislation to increase the academic performance of at-risk children and settle the Prince George's County Public School System desegregation litigation (Chapters 565 and 704 of the Acts of 1998). Again, the legislation created new programs, and enhanced existing programs, that were of interest to local jurisdictions. The School Accountability Funding for Excellence (SAFE) Program (Chapter 565) provided an additional \$6 million for the Aging Schools Program. Again, this was accomplished by including specific allocations for each jurisdiction. As was the case with Chapter 105 of 1997, all funding in Chapter 565 of 1998 was to sunset after fiscal year 2002.

Legislation passed in the 1999 Session of the General Assembly created the Commission on Education Finance, Equity, and Excellence, which came to be known as the Thornton Commission. The Thornton Commission issued an interim report that contained several recommendations to be considered by the General Assembly during the 2001 Session. One of those recommendations was to continue the funding for the programs that were set to sunset after fiscal year 2002, including the Aging Schools Program, through fiscal year 2003. This recommendation was enacted as part of Senate Bill 719 (Chapter 420 of the Acts of 2001). This year, the General Assembly passed Senate Bill 856 (Chapter 288 of the Acts of 2002), historic legislation that further implements the Thornton Commission's recommendations, which extends the Aging Schools Program through fiscal year 2004.

The extensive, yet brief, history of the Program leads to my decision to veto House Bill 937. First, local school systems have been planning to receive the specific allocations contained in the law for fiscal year 2003 since the 2001 Session. House Bill 937 significantly reduces the amount that some local jurisdictions will receive and completely eliminates funding for 3 jurisdictions (Charles, Dorchester and Somerset Counties). In all, 17 jurisdictions, small and large, wealthy and poor, would receive less money than anticipated. For example, Cecil County would receive approximately half of the \$355,000 it was scheduled to receive; Wicomico County would receive