



## House Bill 512

### *Public School Construction - Maximum Gross Area Allowance for English Learner Students*

MACo Position: **SUPPORT**

To: Appropriations Committee

Date: February 19, 2019

From: Robin Clark Eilenberg

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **SUPPORTS** HB 512. This bill would recognize the additional space required to accommodate and support learning for English language students in the K-12 public school system through an update to the State's maximum square foot allowance for school construction.

The State's maximum square foot allowance for school construction represents a cap on funding. When the maximum square foot allowance is too small to accommodate all educational needs, county governments must provide additional funding to ensure that renovations and new construction have the capacity for contemporary school programs.

Several variables, including the age of students, the overall school population, and the types of students served in a school contribute to the State's maximum square foot allowance for a school. While the formula makes accommodations for schools with special education and career and technical education students, there is no special consideration for schools with English language learners.

Special instruction for students who do not speak English as a first language is often held concurrent with other classes. And, when additional classroom space is not available, English language education must occur in hallways or other common spaces that do not provide the quiet environment required to process language. This legislation could provide an additional 30 square feet or more for English Language Learner students to accommodate the space needs for language instruction.

As described in the *21st Century School Facilities Commission Final Report*, when the State limits its square footage allowance in a way that doesn't reflect actual space needs, that decision pressures local budgets.

*Local school systems may elect to build larger buildings than the maximum square footage allowance determined by the State, and they frequently do, but from a funding perspective, any square footage in excess of the State allowance is entirely the responsibility of the local school system.*

*-21st Century School Facilities Commission Final Report*

HB 512 seeks to align English language learners with other special education categories for appropriate representation in the State's school construction area allowance. This relatively minor modification will bring greater balance to the state-local partnership on K-12 school construction projects. For these reasons, MACo **SUPPORTS** HB 512 and urges a **FAVORABLE** report.