County Commissioners:

I respectfully request that you reconsider the current amount proposed to fund the Charles County Board of Education for fiscal year 2022.

The Charles County Commissioners have allocated a $3.9 million increase for fiscal year 2022. This increase does not allow Charles County Public Schools (CCPS) to grow or add new programs like Career and Technology (CTE) Education offerings. CCPS currently has 32 CTE programs, up from 24 in 2013. As the technology changes, it is essential to continue to meet the career-readiness needs of our students.

The Charles County Commissioners' general fund operating budget shows the $3.9 million increase for CCPS is a 2 percent change from the current year. County revenues have increased 3.8 percent. The county's operating budget also shows that the Board of Education's 2 percent increase is lower than most other departments and agencies. For example, the Charles County Sheriff's Office receives a 3 percent increase, emergency services increase is 5.4 percent. The county's total expenditures are up 3.9 percent.

The $3.9 million funding increase only allows CCPS to maintain current operations. Approximately $1.9 million immediately goes toward non-negotiable increases that are the cost of doing business. These mandatory increases include expenses such as insurance, teacher pension contribution and contracted services.

After accounting for the increased cost of doing business, CCPS has $2 million, which isn't enough to fund salary increases. The school system is a people business, and salary compensation is 81 percent of the CCPS operating budget. For example, a 3 percent raise for our employees would cost $7.9 million.

The largest line item in the CCPS budget request is additional funding to attract and retain outstanding teachers. Maryland does not produce enough teachers in its university system to fill the teaching vacancies in Maryland school districts each year. The shrinking pool of teacher candidates requires CCPS to offer competitive salaries.

We know that the school district's budget request is a significant portion of county expenditures. CCPS is the largest employer in the county. About 75 percent of CCPS employees live in Charles County, and they spend their dollars in our community, which boosts the local economy.

CCPS is struggling to hire teachers. The additional funding would allow us to raise our starting teacher salary from $49,751 to $51,244.

If CCPS does not have competitive salaries, we will not find enough teachers to hire, which leads to larger class sizes. Additional funding would allow CCPS to provide salary increases for our 4,000-plus employees. Doing so would acknowledge the need for competitive teacher and staff salaries for the Board to retain and hire highly qualified people to teach and work with children.

Over the past year, the school system has responded to the challenges of COVID-19. Those challenges will continue, and we know that mental health issues will be a concern for both students and staff. The CCPS budget request includes 12 mental-health-related positions—counselors and school psychologists—to help support our children and staff.

When CCPS renovates a school and adds square footage to increase seat capacity, staff needs to increase. Additional support staff, including building service and food service workers, must be hired to care for our children and maintain our buildings.

When we add thousands of pieces of technology to support a one-to-one instructional program, we also need additional professionals to care for and maintain the equipment and the network infrastructure.

We want what is best for our students now and in the future. Please fully fund our request

Respectfully,

Latina Wilson

Chairperson,

Charles County Board of Education