I am writing to you as a constituent and a public school official to ask you to restart the state’s reimbursement program for school construction projects.

The proposed 2019-20 state budget does not include funding for school construction, and although the state has already paid for projects already approved, a moratorium that took effect in 2016 on accepting school projects for reimbursement has left districts left to carry the full financial burden.

Many school districts have undertaken construction or renovation because of safety needs that cannot be ignored. This includes projects to fix leaking roofs, failing mechanical and electrical systems, and crumbling infrastructure. Other projects are necessary to address overcrowded classrooms, and to enhance school security issues.

The need to address aging and inadequate school facilities is critical. Nearly one-third of school district buildings throughout Pennsylvania are in need of replacement or major renovation. The biggest obstacle to construction and renovation projects is financial considerations. As a result, more than half of districts postponed maintenance and renovation projects.

In addition, the reimbursement approval process, known as PlanCon, is in dire need of streamlining and modernization. Last year the state Public School Building Construction and Reconstruction Advisory Committee issued a report that addresses many of the issues and concerns identified with the outdated procedures.

With these recommendations awaiting legislative action, now is the time to institute and fund a new PlanCon process that will serve schools, students and your local communities for years to come.