

Groups call on lawmakers to preserve education funding

By Sara Neufeld, The Baltimore Sun

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Jan. 16--About 400 people turned out last night to demand that state lawmakers make education off-limits in budget cuts needed to close the shortfall. The rally at St. Anne's Episcopal Church in Annapolis drew principals, teachers, parents, children and city schools chief Andres Alonso.

The rally was organized by the advocacy group Baltimoreans United in Leadership Development (BUILD) and its sister organizations: Action In Montgomery (AIM) and **People Acting Together in Howard** (PATH). The three groups announced the formation of a new organizing network, the Maryland Industrial Areas Foundation.

Besides asking that education be spared cuts, the groups want a third of any federal economic stimulus funds to be spent repairing and insulating schools and building recreation and community centers. They're also calling on the General Assembly to pass a law allowing mobile home owners in Howard County the opportunity to purchase the land where their dwellings sit before offering it to developers.

The Rev. Andrew Foster Connors of BUILD said he had heard that Gov. Martin O'Malley does not plan to cut education funds and might increase them. "If the governor wants to increase total education funding, then we applaud the governor tonight," he said.

Political leaders including Sen. Nathaniel J. McFadden and Del. Curtis S. Anderson, both Baltimore Democrats, vowed to support the groups' agenda. But Anderson told the crowd he would need their help to win the support of his colleagues. "There are still 170 more of us that we have to convince," he said.