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DEPUTY MAJORITY WHIP

Ways and Means Committee

Chair
Early Childhood Subcommittee



The Maryland House of Delegates
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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

In Support - HB 1000 - Building Lifelong Library Learners Act

Chairman Kaiser, Vice-Chair Washington, and members of the Ways and Means Committee,

I respectfully request a favorable report of House Bill 1000, the Building Lifelong Library Learners Act. This Bill will make Maryland the first state in the nation to go fine-free for children, increase the State per-capita funding for libraries, increase the capital support we provide to libraries, and increase the State Library Resource Center funding.

One would be hard-pressed to think of a greater public good than the library. Libraries are free, welcoming places where anyone can expand their worldview with a new book, use the computer to search for a new career opportunity, hold their monthly meeting, and, perhaps most importantly, build a lifelong love and respect for reading and learning at a very young age.

Every child deserves that same opportunity to feel welcomed in their community library. Children are more likely to continue behavior, such as volunteering, and civic engagement, that they start early in life into adulthood. This list also includes reading at a young age. We need to help start reading as a value, by increasing library accessibility, in Maryland's young people.

Unfortunately, the small but prohibitive financial barriers of late fees can create barriers between children, one of our greatest community assets, and potentially a lifelong love of learning. HB 1000 seeks to create a welcoming environment by eliminating late fees for children and teens. This is not a novel idea - all but six counties in our State already have similar policies. You will find 22 letters of support from nearly every jurisdiction's county library in your bill file. The American Library Association passed a resolution just last year to encourage library systems to go fine-free in an effort to balance social inequality and encourage library participation. More Americans visited a public library than went to the movies last year. We have an opportunity to encourage that participation and create lifelong learners.

To be clear, this bill is no free ride. Libraries will still send notifications for late books and be empowered to charge replacement fees 21 days after a book is due. Children will still be taught responsibility and accountability - but without the potentially shameful and oftentimes financial roadblock of a late fee. Children have sometimes been blocked from borrowing new books because of outstanding late fees. That