

RE: House Bill 383 Young Readers Program-Expansion Act

Dear Members of the House Ways & Means Committee,

I am writing to voice support for House Bill 383, the Young Readers Program Expansion Act. As a board member for the United Way of the Lower Eastern Shore (UWLES) and the Vice President of Population Health for TidalHealth, I have seen firsthand the significant impact of the Imagination Library in Dorchester, Somerset, Wicomico, and Worcester counties. Since launching the program locally, UWLES has served over 11,000 children on the Lower Eastern Shore, delivering over 314,000 high-quality, age-appropriate books to date.

New enrollment requests are received daily and the demand for the program remains high. Although open to all children, UWLES' outreach targets at-risk and lower-income populations through collaboration with nonprofit and social service agencies, Head Start/Early Learning centers, public libraries, pediatricians, all four county school systems, and participation in community outreach events. With over 46% of Lower Shore households struggling financially to make ends meet each month as indicated by the 2020 Maryland ALICE® Report, there remains a significant need to help more local families who may lack the resources needed to support early learning.

TidalHealth recently agreed to partner with the UWLES and Imagination Library to enrolled newborns in the program before leaving the hospital. This effort will increase participation, and therefore program costs. Funds available through the Young Readers Program Expansion Act as a match for local funding would greatly support this increase and empower UWLES to bring the benefits of Imagination Library to all children and families in our four Lower Shore counties.

Imagination Library is a proven success driver for early learning and development. I am hopeful that we will be able to continue to expand this program for the Lower Shore. I welcome the opportunity to answer questions or discuss further. Thank you for your consideration of House Bill 383 and this important initiative to support Maryland families.

Sincerely,



Kathryn Fiddler, DNP, MBA, RN
Vice President Population Health
TidalHealth