



February 3, 2022

RE: House Bill 383 Younger Readers Program—Expansion Act

Dear Delegates Attar, Branch, Ebersole, Feldmark, and Guyton of the Maryland House of Representatives Ways and Means Committee:

In 2014, as Assistant Vice Provost for Academic Affairs at UMBC, I worked with other members of the UMB-UMBC chapter of the Honor Society of Phi Kappa Phi (PKP) to establish a partnership with Dolly Parton’s Imagination Library (DPIL) and the St. Vincent de Paul Early Head Start program in Baltimore City Zip code 21215, the Park Heights community. PKP is a private, nonprofit organization that recognizes academic excellence among college and university students and scholars. We encourage service by our members and the promotion of literacy for all persons as a personal and public good. As an organization we are strongly committed to the goal of getting books into the homes and hands of preschool children to enrich their lives, inspire them to love reading and learning, and prepare them as well as possible for the academic, occupational, and personal success that begins to develop from their first day of kindergarten.

Delegates Ebersole and Feldman, as representatives of the 12th district that includes UMBC, we ask your support for expansion of the Young Readers Program. The PKP DPIL program that we initiated from UMBC was the very first DPIL program to serve Baltimore City, and we continue to send books to children in the Park Heights community today. Please support expansion of the program to serve many more children in many more neighborhoods in Baltimore and across Maryland.

Delegates Attar and Branch, as representatives of districts 41 and 45, respectively, we ask your support for HB 383, because in the absence of a representative on the committee from district 40, the community of the St. Vincent de Paul Early Head Start program and the children our program serves, we rely on you as our closest neighbors to the Park Heights community. You can speak to the great need for additional funds to send as many books as possible to preschool children in neighborhoods across Baltimore and Maryland.

Delegate Guyton, as a representative from district 42B, you represent me and the community where I live in Baltimore County. As you know, it will benefit the people of district 42B, our whole Baltimore Metropolitan area, and indeed our whole State of Maryland, for more children in need in our district and across Maryland to receive, enjoy, and grow to love books, and to have a chance to develop the skills and love of learning needed to succeed in their education and their lives. All the children in need in Maryland are our neighbors, they need us, and we need your support on HB 383.

Since the 2014 founding of our DPIL project, our PKP chapter has raised the funds privately to send DPIL books to 108 children in the Park Heights community, working in collaboration with the St. Vincent de Paul Early Head Start. Many of our children have been enrolled at birth and receive books for the full five years before they “graduate” to kindergarten. We enroll some children later, at one to four years of age, whenever they first come to us. Several years ago, we met with some of the parents of our children and asked them about the impact of the DPIL books on their lives and their children’s lives. The parents were grateful and happy for the children to receive the books, which, in many cases, they could not afford to buy for their children. Parents spoke of their children’s excitement on the day the monthly book arrives, and they reported that their children felt proud that these special books belong to them. They ask their parents to read the books to them; they learn the stories; and parents report that their children’s vocabularies grow and grow. Parents report that their children carry their books around with them like prized possessions, and they ask to go to the library to get more books to read. Even after operating our program for eight years now, I get goosebumps describing to you how so much good for our children and our communities can be done through DPIL at such low cost. Children who learn early to love reading and learning have their whole lives and the whole world of opportunities opened to them.

DPIL is a national treasure, a gem of an organization that makes all this not only possible, but easy to do. And the evaluation and research studies on DPIL document the very same outcomes that parents report for their children and families.

Just before the pandemic began, our PKP chapter began exploring how we might expand the reach of our DPIL work in the Park Heights community by establishing a second partnership in the area with another organization that serves children. With the pandemic now seeming to recede, we'll get back to planning that expansion now. We want to send books to more children! And we ask that you support HB 383 so you, too, may experience the joy of sending books to more children. The State of Maryland should commit additional public funds to encourage other organizations like ours to step up and partner with DPIL to send books to as many children as possible in communities in need across our State. Everyone in Maryland wins when more children have books to read!

Thank you so much for your consideration of our thoughts and for your work on the House Ways and Means Committee and on behalf of the people of the State of Maryland.

Sincerely,



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