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To: House Ways and Means Committee

RE: House Bill 383 Young Readers Program-Expansion Act

Testimony provided by: Karen Karten, Early Childhood Supervisor and Judy Center Coordinator

Most of us can remember a favorite book from our childhood and the flood of memories that books brings to us. We also know that reading to a child not only builds their literacy skills, it also impacts their other areas of learning such as math and science and helps build social skills and helps foster healthy emotional development.

As the Early Childhood Supervisor and Judy Center Coordinator in Somerset County, I know how important it is that children learn to love reading. On the first day of Pre-K, it is easy to spot a child who has been read to from one who has not. Can you imagine a child not knowing what to do with a book, not understanding how stories unfold and not having the closeness associated with a grown up spending the time to read a story? I truly appreciate the work of Dolly Parton's Imagination Library because it brings the opportunity to support early literacy into the lives of all of our families. Children who are registered for this program are eager to get their books each month and this program helps families build home libraries and builds a lifelong love of reading. All of the books are always high quality, early childhood books that help promote diversity, self-esteem and learning. Since 2014, Somerset County Public Schools and the Judy Center in Somerset County have partnered with the United Way of the Lower Eastern Shore to help spread the word about the importance of the Imagination Library Program. Expansion of this program would be an enormous asset to our young learners in our county. When a child comes to school, with the love of reading already planted, it makes the job of our schools so much easier. Programs such as the Imagination Library help our children come to school on the right track and ready to learn!



www.richardhensonfoundation.org

February 3, 2022

RE: House Bill 383 Young Readers Program-Expansion Act

Dear Members of the House Ways & Means Committee,

Today, I write to advocate for House Bill 383, the Young Readers Program- Expansion Act. The Richard A. Henson Foundation, a private foundation based in Salisbury, Maryland, has been focused on supporting educational opportunities in the greater Salisbury area for more than 30 years. It is our firm belief that engaging our youth at the earliest stages of life provides a strong foundation of education and lifelong love of learning.

There has been significant data presented to our foundation to support Dolly Parton's Imagination Library. We have partnered with United Way of the Lower Eastern Shore to deliver books directly to the homes of children in our community since 2014.

Earlier this year an article published by Banner Health Center in Mesa, Arizona, stated "that eighty-five to ninety percent of a child's brain develops by age five. Specifically, this means children can grow and develop new skills quickly- from thinking and speaking skills to social and emotional skills." One of the single best things a parent or guardian can do to help a child's development is read to them every day. Reading helps develop language, social skills, and even fine motor skills.

So significant to childhood literacy is access to books, that in August of 2020, neighboring Delaware Governor John Carney committed to the launch of Dolly Parton's Imagination Library statewide through the Delaware Library System. Enrollment in the Imagination Library directly correlates to reading levels of nine and ten-year old children. The reading levels of these third graders then directly correlates to high school graduation rates and then virtually all additional positive outcomes.

Having quality books delivered directly to homes, through Dolly Parton's Imagination Library, provides the necessary resources families need to support early child development. With the passage of House Bill 383, the Young Readers Program-Expansion Act, and sending resources to the lower eastern shore, you can ensure that every child has access to books and improved development opportunities no matter the socio-economic status of the household.

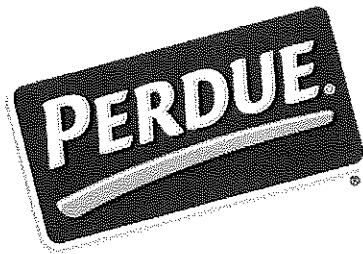
Thank you for your consideration for House Bill 383 to benefit the youngest citizens in our state with enhanced literacy opportunities.

Sincerely,

Stacey McMichael
Executive Director

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TO: House Ways and Means Committee, Maryland House of Representatives
 FROM: Kim Nechay, Executive Director
 Franklin P. and Arthur W. Perdue Foundation *Kim Nechay*
 DATE: February 3, 2022
 REF: House Bill 383 - Young Readers Program-Expansion Act

Thank you for taking the time to review the materials related to the above referenced Bill. This is an important piece of legislation that will impact Maryland's youngest citizens. I do hope that each of you supports House Bill 383.

As a parent of three daughters, I know first-hand, the importance of exposure to reading, books and the bonding time of sharing a story with a child. The Young Readers Program – Expansion Act will provide materials to more families to assure this happens with and for a greater number of children than ever before through the kinds of programs it will fund.

One of these programs is The Imagination Library on the Eastern Shore of Maryland, which is run by United Way of the Lower Eastern Shore. Perdue, The Perdue Foundation, The Perdue Family and thousands of our associates support the efforts of the United Way of the Lower Eastern Shore. We see what a difference they make with programs like Imagination Library and are proud to support these efforts by collectively being one of their largest donors every single year.

Seizing the opportunity to expand programs such as Imagination Library will dramatically impact so many children and assure their readiness for kindergarten. The success of early learning programs such as Imagination Library on the Eastern Shore is marked and well-documented.

<u>County</u>	<u>Kindergarten Composite Readiness</u>
Dorchester	Imagination Library (IL) 55% vs Non Imagination Library 40%
Somerset	Imagination Library (IL) 67% vs Non Imagination Library 61%
Wicomico	Imagination Library (IL) 54% vs Non Imagination Library 39%
Worcester	Imagination Library (IL) 72% vs Non Imagination Library 61%

Just "imagine" what this program could do with more resources!

Again, I hope you see the great value of House Bill 383 to Maryland's youngest citizens. At Perdue, we certainly do!



Franklin P. & Arthur W. Perdue Foundation