



GOVERNOR'S COORDINATING OFFICES

Community Initiatives · Service & Volunteerism · Deaf & Hard of Hearing
Crime Prevention, Youth, & Victim Services · Small, Minority, & Women Business Affairs
Banneker-Douglass Museum · Volunteer Maryland

February 16, 2022

Chair Paul G. Pinsky
Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee
2 West Miller Senate Office Building
11 Bladen St
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

RE: SB 438/HB 383 - Young Readers Programs - Establishment (Young Readers Program Expansion Act)

Dear Chair Pinsky and Members of the Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee,

The Governor's Office of Crime Prevention, Youth, and Victim Services (Office) is providing this letter of information for Senate Bill 438/House Bill 383: Young Readers Programs - Establishment (Young Readers Program Expansion Act).

This legislation establishes the Baltimore City Young Readers Program within the Division of Children and Youth of the Governor's Office of Crime Prevention, Youth, and Victim Services to mail free, high-quality books to certain children; establishes the Young Readers Matching Grant Program within the Division to provide matching grants to counties to support the establishment and operation of certain book-gifting services; and requiring the Deputy Director of the Division to administer the programs. The Governor would be required to include in the annual budget bill an appropriation of \$200,000 to the Baltimore City Young Readers Program as well as an annual appropriation of \$500,000 to the Young Readers Matching Grant Program. The Office advised additional staff is required to operate the grant program, in the form of an additional full-time grants coordinator to receive and approve grant applications and distribute grant awards and associated operating expenses, as well as a part-time support staff to ensure compliance with statute and reporting measures.

The Imagination Library Program was started by Dolly Parton in 1995, and is a "a book gifting program that mails free, high-quality books to children from birth until they begin school, no matter their family's income."¹ Today, the program spans five countries and mails over one million free books each month to

¹ Dolly Parton's Imagination Library. (2019). [About Dolly Parton's Imagination Library](#).

children around the world.² The Office in FY 2016, implemented the State-supported version of this program (also known as the [Governor's Young Readers Program](#)) in Baltimore City with funds from the Children's Cabinet Interagency Fund. The goal of this program is to improve children's literacy levels, increase parent-child interaction, and better prepare children before they enter school. The Banneker Douglass Museum Foundation serves as the non-profit affiliate for this initiative. The Judy Centers of Baltimore City provides programmatic support and enrollment efforts by engaging the families they serve to participate in the Governor's Young Readers Program. Judy Centers are located in eleven Title I schools in the Baltimore City Region and provide early education services to children under the age of 5.

The Office reported on the expansion of this program in a FY 20 Joint Chairmen's Report and reported that enrollment in the program has grown substantially with over 7,882 children enrolled as of September 2019. There are 12 program affiliates of Dolly Parton's Imagination Library in Maryland of which 11 are separate from the State-funded program in Baltimore City. These additional affiliates serve children in Allegany, Caroline, Frederick, Garrett, Howard, Kent, Montgomery, Prince George's, Queen Anne's, and Talbot counties, and the Lower Eastern Shore, which serves Dorchester, Somerset, Wicomico, and Worcester counties. Together, the program is available in 15 of 24 Maryland jurisdictions.

This bill, if enacted, would expand the Young Readers Program to multiple jurisdictions statewide and provide ample opportunities for children under the age of 5 in the county to receive free, high-quality books. This program would work to improve children's literacy levels, increase parent-child interaction, and better prepare children before they enter school.

Please feel free to reach out to the Office for further information as needed.

Sincerely,



V. Glenn Fueston, Jr.
Executive Director
Governor's Office of Crime Prevention, Youth, and Victim Services

² Dolly Parton's Imagination Library. (2019). [Newsletter](#). Dolly Parton's Imagination Library. (2019). [Dolly Parton's Imagination Library. United States](#). The "How It Works" illustration is specific to the United States.