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SB0848

February 21, 2024

TO: Members of the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee
FROM: Nina Themelis, Director of Mayor's Office of Government Relations
RE: Senate Bill 848 - Enoch Pratt Free Library Capital Project Funding

POSITION: SUPPORT

Chair Guzzone, Vice Chair Rosapepe, and members of the Committee, please be advised that the Baltimore City Administration (BCA) **supports** Senate Bill (SB) 848.

The Enoch Pratt Free Library (the Pratt) is one of Baltimore's most trusted institutions. The library breaks down the barriers for our community, connecting people with information, services, and opportunities to help them meet their goals. However, the Pratt has reached a crossroads when it comes to infrastructure. The library has some of the oldest buildings in the state, with **6 libraries over 100 years old**. Only two Pratt Library buildings were built this century. A recent building assessment by an outside vendor found the **total cost to stabilize Pratt Library infrastructure is \$197,300,000**. Those improvements include structural upgrades and repairs to ensure long-term integrity of buildings, replacing antiquated systems with energy-efficient new technology, modernization of public spaces to improve user experience, and more.

These critical infrastructure needs are taking their toll on our city. The Pratt's Northwood branch is one example of a building with high usage, but significant structural deficiencies. The branch serves a community that is predominantly African American. Nearly 20% of that community face economic insecurity and more than 18% lack digital access. But last Fiscal Year, the Northwood branch was forced to close for 58 days due to deteriorating building conditions. That means for 20% of the year, that community could not access free internet, free resources, free tutoring, free after school programs for kids, free legal help, free social work, and more. A recent Facility Condition Report of the branch found every piece of the building - from the roof, to the walls, to the HVAC system - to be either in a critical state, potentially critical, or in need of replacement. For years, library officials have taken measures to try and alleviate building issues, such as installing temporary cooling units. However, without critical intervention, the Northwood branch will close permanently. Northwood is just one of many branches in need of critical repairs.

SB 848 could be a game changer for the Pratt Library. An infusion of state funding would help maintain infrastructure, functionality, and sustainability of library buildings. It will help the library leverage private dollars that can also be used to improve customer experience. And most importantly, it will help ensure that future generations have access to the vital resources of our public library.

For the above reasons, the BCA respectfully requests a favorable report on SB 848.