

BILL: House Bill 825 DATE: February 14, 2024

SUBJECT: Libraries – Regional Resource **COMMITTEE:** Ways and Means

Centers – Governance

Requirements

SPEAKER: Irene Padilla, State Librarian **POSITION:** Favorable

EXPLANATION

The Maryland State Library Agency (MSLA) is in support of HB 825 and encourages a favorable review. This bill brings Maryland's regional libraries into compliance with community-based, principled governance structures that employ best practices for a non-profit entity funded by taxpayers.

There are three regional libraries that support the regional resource center network. The Eastern Shore Regional Library, Inc. (ESRL) in Salisbury was established in 1992 as a 501(c)(3) non-profit library corporation and represents the libraries in Caroline, Dorchester, Kent, Queen Anne's, Somerset, Talbot, Wicomico and Worcester counties. The Southern Maryland Regional Library Association, Inc. in Charlotte Hall was established in 1959 as a 501(c)(3) non-profit corporation and represents the libraries in Calvert, Charles and St. Mary's counties. The Western Maryland Regional Library in Hagerstown was established in 1967 as a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization and represents the libraries in Allegany, Garrett and Washington Counties. WMRL is administered through a MOU between the participating libraries in the region and the Washington County Free Library (WCFL). The Maryland State Library Agency is responsible for oversight of the regional resource centers.

SB§ 23-202.1 Regional Resource Centers Governance was passed during the 2023 session. In the original bill (SB 831/HB 1115 Libraries - Regional Resource Centers - Governance Requirements), the Board membership consisted of one library trustee from each participating library system; and up to two members of the public from each area served by the participating library systems. 23-202.1(b)(1)(2).

However, this section of the bill was amended prior to the final vote as follows "Up to two members one member of the public from each area served by the participating library systems" due to a misconception about the role of the regionals and concerns about the public Board members' presumed influence on library collections and the freedom to read.

The proposed revision will expand the diversity of the Regional Resource Center Boards and allow for more equitable representation for the communities served. Currently, the Regional Resource Centers have little or no diversity on their Boards and do not reflect the communities served. Board membership consists overwhelmingly of retired librarians with insufficient equity

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between groups in the region, including but not limited to racial, gender, and socioeconomic equity.

This change would allow the Regional Resource Centers greater flexibility in recruiting Board members that are aligned with library and community initiatives such as an Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI).

The proposed bill reflects adaptive regional libraries whose trustees' valued skill sets directly contribute to mission accomplishment and to the libraries' prominence in their region. Community-based membership allows regional libraries to recruit board members who can advance the regional library agenda--e.g., community leaders, attorneys, financial experts, fundraisers, and advocates. This broadens and elevates the regional library as an entity mindful of larger community issues--e.g., economic development, health, transportation, and public safety--versus looking internally to county library issues.

MSLA fully supports the passage of this bill.