



BILL: SB 378 **DATE:** 3/19/2025

SUBJECT: State Library Agency - Family Literacy Program - Establishment **COMMITTEE:** House Ways & Means

SPEAKER: Morgan Lehr Miller, State Librarian **POSITION:** Favorable

EXPLANATION

The Maryland State Library Agency (MSLA) is in support of SB 378 and encourages a favorable review.

This important legislation creates a family literacy partnership between the Maryland State Library Agency and the Department of Labor, which oversees education programs in correctional facilities, including the state's 12 prison librarians, to develop a 3-year pilot at four correctional facility sites throughout the state. The pilot program will assist inmates in recording picture book stories for their children and grandchildren.

The Family Literacy Pilot program strongly supports the Moore-Miller Administration's priorities to end childhood poverty by addressing cycles and helping to create sustained long-term wealth, setting Maryland's students up for success, creating an equitable, robust, and competitive economy, and creating safer communities.

There are approximately [32,000 individuals](#) incarcerated in Maryland. Across the nation, [nearly half \(47%\)](#) of the approximately 1.25 million people in state prisons are parents of minor children, and about 1 in 5 (19%) of those children is age 4 or younger. In Baltimore alone, an [estimated 20,000 children](#) have a parent who is incarcerated or is on parole/probation.

[Children with a parent in prison may experience low self-esteem, depression, disturbed sleeping patterns, and symptoms of post-traumatic stress.](#) In a [North American study](#), separation from a parent through imprisonment was found to be more detrimental to a child's well-being than divorce or the death of a parent.

Many incarcerated individuals share that they were never read to or had books in the home, and many now struggle with literacy. According to data from the National Adult Literacy Survey, [70% of inmates are functionally illiterate](#). In addition to helping develop family bonding and interest in reading for both the inmates and the children at home, Family Literacy programs build

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home libraries and print-rich environments, which research has proven is unequivocally linked to student achievement and to lifelong success. In fact, [as few as 25 books in the home leads to an additional three years of schooling for children living in low income households.](#)

Family Literacy Programs provide a life-changing opportunity to connect children with an incarcerated parent in a positive way. [Studies show](#) that creating a connection between a parent and child fosters family engagement. These types of specialized family literacy programs help strengthen families and increase the chances of a parent remaining in the home and connected to family upon release from prison, ensuring better outcomes for both parent and child.

Our agency is particularly excited to connect inmates and their families to the full spectrum of resources and support that their local public library systems can provide. From providing added opportunities for family engagement and early literacy building to workforce and social services support, public libraries are poised to foster lifelong connections to learning and community.

As a leader of the pilot, MSLA is excited to collaborate with our partners at the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services and the Correctional Education Council, as well as the prison librarians currently serving the population. We will seek to do so in the most impactful and cost-effective way, by leveraging a combination of the agency's federal funds, philanthropic donations, and partner resources to carry out each year of the pilot. During the pilot, MSLA does not anticipate the need for any additional funds from the General Assembly. Should the program be implemented further beyond the pilot, funding will need to be reexamined at that time. Thank you for your careful consideration.

MSLA supports the passage of this bill.