

Delegate Maggie McIntosh, Chairwoman
House Appropriations Committee
House Office Building -Room 121
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

January 28, 2021

RE: House Bill 436 Enoch Pratt Free Library – Operating Hours and Funding
Position: Support

Dear Chairwoman McIntosh and Members of the House Appropriations Committee,

On behalf of the Enoch Pratt Free Library, and the citizens of Baltimore, we respectfully request support of the Baltimore City Senate Delegation for **House Bill 436- Enoch Pratt Library- Operating Hours and Funding.**

I am a member of the “Pratt Contemporaries,” the group that serves as a bridge between the Pratt and Baltimore area young professionals. Expanding Pratt's operating hours means expanding public access to services that go beyond what are thought of as traditional library services. The Pratt has provided the only means for accessing computers and the internet to thousands of Baltimore citizens who lacked access at home. In addition, the Pratt provides robust programming and learning opportunities for adults, teens, and children.

Throughout the pandemic, the public’s need for digital connection has become even more urgent as life, information, and access has shifted to the virtual world. Enoch Pratt is leading the way when it comes to narrowing the digital divide by providing wireless access in its parking lots, loaning laptops and mobile hot spots, using its Bookmobiles as traveling hotspots to take internet to the far reaches of our city, and allowing limited access to computers within our buildings. But this is not enough- far too many citizens, especially our youngsters, are being left behind at a time when expedient access to information and services including those coming from the public health and government realms- can be as important as life and death.

Since library hours were expanded the Pratt has seen:

- 25% increase in collection use
- 10% increase in reference materials which supports educational studies
- 43% increase in Wi-Fi usage
- 65% increase in social media followers

We urge your support for HB 436 which will provide the funding to allow the Pratt to continue expanding its operating hours at a time when residents need the resources the most to thrive during COVID recovery.

Thank you for your ongoing support of the Enoch Pratt Library and public libraries throughout Maryland.

Sincerely,



Stacey R. Wittelsberger – Chair, Pratt Contemporaries

cc: Heidi Daniel – CEO, Enoch Pratt Free Library
Gordon Krabbe-COO, Enoch Pratt Free Library