

Written Testimony of

NANCY SMITH

Library Associate II, Harford County Public Library

Submitted to the Appropriations Committee on March 4, 2022

Please Pass Bill HB1225

Honorable Delegates,

My name is Nancy Smith. I have been working as a Library Associate II with Harford County Public Library for over 20 years.

During those years I have worked with customers at the Reference Desk, helping them to find answers or resources which answer their very varied questions; I have helped customers use computers as well their mobile devices; I have written and presented many trainings to the public (as well as to staff) on the electronic databases and services offered through the library; when downloadable eBooks became available, training to staff was almost non-existent, so another staff member and I created a 13 weeks long training package that guided staff through all the different services and how to use them on Android, Nook, Apple and Kindle devices- and we met one on one with staff members who needed that extra help; I have run book clubs; I helped with some of the training of new staff members; I am one of the go-to people when someone has technology problems.

For many years I was proud of the varied resources we offered our customers and I loved helping our customers. The kinds of questions and assistance I have been asked for on a typical day have ranged from: finding books on wedding planning, or information on a specific type of cancer, or finding books for a school research project; recommending books to someone looking for that next great read; teaching someone how to download books onto their iPad; finding tax and legal forms; helping people navigate a specific website they must use; helping a grieving mother print her 16 year old son's obituary. I have done all this and more at a salary less than that of a first-year teacher because I have loved my work. My complaint is not about the money. I love the people I work with and I love the customers I serve. Imagine my shock and dismay, then, when the Comp and Classification Study came out and I was basically told that despite all the things I do on a daily basis I had been over-valued and therefore my position's pay-range was being decreased! I was told I am nothing more than a basic customer service provider. Do those tasks (above) describing my accomplishments sound like the work of a simple customer service provider?

Along with being disappointed with how my position and contributions have been viewed by our administrators, I am distressed to see the direction the library is being taken. The number of books we have on the shelves is reduced. We no longer have a robust print Reference Collection – when we were instructed to weed most of our print reference books we were told that our electronic databases provided more. For many years we did have a nice assortment of very varied and specialized databases meant to replace those print volumes. However, we currently subscribe to fewer of those specialty

databases and the ones we do carry are very general and offer less to the researcher. Furthermore, we no longer have any of the national newspapers in print. Librarians are upset and frustrated by these reductions, and our customers are noticing as well. For instance, for nearly 10 years several librarians and I did an annual presentation to Harford Day School seniors as they began work on their annual semester long research paper. We taught them how to search for books in the catalog and where to find them in the library; how to search and use our reference databases; and how to use some of our wonderful online learning services to assist them with their writing. Sadly, a few years ago (before the pandemic), that teacher told us that she was no longer going to bring her students to us since the library no longer has the volume of books and wonderful databases as we had in the past...basically, there is little at the library now to make such a trip worthwhile. We politely told her how sorry we are, and quietly agreed with her in our hearts. I am equally embarrassed when I must tell an 80-year-old customer that if they want to read a national newspaper at the library then they will need to do it online. Programming is also down, yes, partly due to the pandemic, but also because branch librarians are being told that they must do the same kinds of programs as the other branches. Variety, creativity, and innovation are discouraged at the branch level.

Working at the library no longer brings the joy it once did. Morale is at an all-time low. My days now consist of shelving books, shifting books on the shelves and boxing books we no longer need, with a few hours helping customers on the floor. I can't help but feel disrespected to find myself reduced to being assigned these tasks after the many years when I have given so much to HCPL.

When librarians have brought our concerns to Senior Staff and the Board itself, we have been ignored. Yes, the Board members politely listen, and some appear to take notes, and then we hear nothing further. Library staff needs a voice. Our concerns need to be heard and addressed, for the good of the staff, and for the good of the county. I am asking that you support Bill HB 1225 so we are given a voice and so Harford Countians can have the library system they deserve.

Thank you for your time.

Nancy Smith