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New Windsor, MD 21776



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Testimony in support of SB 448, Public Libraries – Education – Regional Resource Centers and Libraries – Funding

Hearing before the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee

Tuesday, February 15 at 1 pm

Submitted by Andrea Berstler

Dear Committee Chair Guzzone and Distinguished Senators:

I am writing to support SB 448 Public Libraries – Education – Regional Resource Centers and Libraries – Funding

The bill is intended to ensure that Maryland's 24 Public Libraries and their Regional Resource Centers have sustained funding for the coming fiscal years, so they can provide for the information and educational needs of their communities.

Communities throughout Maryland depend on their public libraries to provide a myriad of services, programs and resources. In times of crisis, such as the ones we have experienced in the last 2 years, libraries have become more important than ever. Beyond being a place where individuals borrow items to read, listen or view, they are community hubs. Libraries across the state provide test kits and masks, serve as vaccine clinic locations, expanded their Wi-Fi signals to allow people to connect to the internet, engage in online programs to help people feel connected and informed, created pickup services to provide materials to people safely during the height of the pandemic, and continue to serve the information needs of people across their areas. They also supply workforce development training, introduce communities to new technology, and provide training to help prepare the next generation workforce.

Carroll County Public Library recently opened Exploration Commons. This 14,000 sq. ft. high-tech makerspace and commercial teaching kitchen is where we are doing workforce development training and enrichment workshops. Classes include coding, design and fabrication, nutrition and wellness, and use of AR/VR and AV equipment as well as providing the community with a suite of meeting rooms. Public libraries across Maryland are developing new and innovative services to meet the needs of the people in their community.

The Regional Resource Centers provide crucial support for the Western, Southern and Eastern Shore regions of Maryland. The Regionals support the work of their public libraries through technology support, staff development and training, delivery services, marketing and publicity, website support and many other services. By providing these services to the libraries in their region, they allow those public libraries to focus their manpower, resources, and funding to improving their collections, providing programs and serving their unique communities.

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Maryland has a strong history of valuing its educational organizations, such as public libraries. This legislation will allow libraries to continue to develop and grow the next generation of libraries. Thank you very much for your consideration and continued support of Maryland libraries.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Andrea", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Andrea Berstler

Executive Director, Carroll County Public Library

Legislative Officer, Maryland Library Association