



Southern Maryland Regional Library Association, Inc.

Advancing Library Excellence

February 2, 2022

The Honorable Arthur Ellis
Maryland State Senator for District 28
James Senate Office Building, Room 302
11 Bladen St., Annapolis, MD 21401

Re: Senate Bill 108 – Charles County Public Library – Imagination Library Program - Funding

Dear Senator Ellis,

The Southern Maryland Regional Library Association (SMRLA) supports early childhood literacy and the efforts of the Charles County Public Library (CCPL) to launch the Charles County Imagination Library under the leadership of Executive Director Mr. KennethWayne Thompson.

According to the Maryland State Department of Education's 2019-2020 Kindergarten Readiness Assessment Report, only 44% of kindergarteners in Charles County demonstrated readiness to engage in the kindergarten curriculum which is less than the state average of 47% (Education, Maryland State Department of). COVID-19 interruptions to education are estimated to have increased the number of students who experience reading difficulties by 20% according to a study by the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (100 million more children fail basic reading skills because of COVID-19, 2021).

Mr. Thompson understands the critical role public libraries provide in exposing children ages birth to five to reading. Additionally, the caregivers of preschoolers benefit from the expertise of librarians who select age appropriate books and activities to keep children engaged during story times. Once caregivers are home, the Charles County Imagination Library mails a new book to the child's home monthly until the age of five. The Dolly Parton Imagination Library says: "Some studies found Dolly Parton's Imagination Library had promise with respect to developing children's early literacy skills, as participants had more advanced skills than their classmates who did not participate in the program" (Supportive Research: Exploring How the Imagination Library Impacts Communities, 2022).

The Charles County Imagination Library is a natural continuation of CCPL's preschool programming. By helping children develop their own personal library collection at home, traditional barriers to access such as transportation to the library, are removed by shipping books directly to the home. As part of CCPL's long term strategy to develop lifelong readers, the Charles County Imagination Library can help close the achievement gap in Charles County and support children entering kindergarten get ready to engage in learning.

Sincerely,

Ashley Teagle, CEO