



# Southern Maryland Regional Library Association, Inc.

*Advancing Library Excellence*

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My name is Ashley Teagle and I'm the CEO of the Southern Maryland Regional Library Association which provides support services to our public library partners in Calvert, Charles, and St. Mary's counties. Thank you to Senator Ellis for sponsoring Senate Bill 108 which will provide Charles County Public Library's Imagination Library with funding.

Charles County Public Library's Imagination Library launched in October 2021 and there are currently over 1,000 children under the age of five receiving a free book each month delivered to their door. This important program builds on the library's existing 500 by 5 Early Literacy Program which encourages children to read 500 books by 5 years old. As noted on the library's website, there are numerous benefits to exposing young children to books and reading including: helping parents build a stronger relationship with their child; increasing basic speech and communication skills; improving logical thinking; increasing vocabulary; enhancing concentration and discipline; helping to ease transitions to major milestones; and promoting school readiness.

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%. Charles County Public Library is an excellent community partner to help close this achievement gap for young children.

According to the Office of Head Start's Early Childhood Learning & Knowledge Center, books not only benefit babies and toddlers before they learn how to talk—older children benefit as well. "Books provide a great opportunity for back-and-forth interactions with older children. This supports word learning and preliteracy skills."

Numerous studies have demonstrated no downside to exposing young children to books and reading. According to the Dolly Parton Imagination Library website: "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."

Additionally, I would direct your attention to Governor Hogan's Young Readers Initiative in Baltimore City. A press release for the Governor's Young Readers Program said: "Statistics and independent reports have shown Dolly Parton's Imagination Library has dramatically improved early childhood literacy and reading scores for those enrolled."

I am hopeful the benefits of this great program will persuade you to not only fund Charles County Public Library's Imagination Library but to consider funding this program statewide to benefit children everywhere in Maryland. Thank you.