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Hello! Members of the Committee, I am writing to support a favorable review for the Young Readers Program Expansion Act (HB 383/SB 438).

As Executive Director of The Dollywood Foundation, I know advancing literacy skills for children from birth is paramount to the lives of Maryland children and families. Reading is the key for lifelong learning and the single most important activity for building knowledge required for eventual success in school, work, and life in general.

Brain science tell us that baby's brain rapidly grows before entering school with 90% developed by age 4. If we wait till children enter kindergarten for exposure to books and reading - it is too late. The Reading Network in children's brains does not naturally exist; it is built by reading. Reading at home requires books - this is where we can help!

Dolly Parton's Imagination Library inspires family reading, is community-based to drive ownership, and is designed to improve the lives of children at scale.

For over 27 years, The Dollywood Foundation annually contributes several million dollars to make the Imagination Library available, covering expenses such as administrative, operational, database management, marketing, training, technical assistance and more. Shared costs model keeps local program costs down to only reduced wholesale book and mailing and local administrative expenses. The state match grant as proposed in the bill will financially help the local affiliate programs and allow them to increase service to more children.

Simply getting books into the home changes the trajectory of kids, families, and communities. This program is big impact with low cost, low effort, and low risk.

["Create a love for books and reading - give every child the start they need in education and life"](#)

Thank you for considering expanding the Young Readers Program. The Dollywood Foundation is ready to support and assist Maryland children from birth to 5 years old have access to high-quality, age-appropriate books at no cost to families.

Kindly,

Nora Briggs
The Dollywood Foundation