

**Maryland Senate Education, Health, and Environmental
Affairs Committee**

**SB 438 - Young Readers Programs – Establishment (Young
Readers Program Expansion Act)**

**February 16, 2022 Hearing
Support**

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Dear Chair Pinsky, Vice Chair Kagan, and Committee Members,

I am writing on behalf of the Prince George's County Memorial Library System (PGCMLS) in **support of SB 438 Education – Young Readers Programs – Establishment (Young Readers Program Expansion Act)**. The bill will provide essential support to Maryland's public libraries, including PGCMLS, for advancing early literacy and kindergarten readiness for young Marylanders (from birth to age 5).

PGCMLS's existing Dolly Parton Imagination Library program is called **Books from Birth**. The program launched in July 2017 with funding from the Library's operating budget that was designated by then-Prince George's County Executive, Rushern Baker. This program encourages parents and caregivers to talk, sing, share books and play with their very young children to prepare them for school and life. Having books in the home has a strong effect on children's educational attainment even above and beyond such factors as education level of the parents and parental occupation. Ensuring that a child has just twenty books still has a significant impact on a young child's later success in school, but our program goes beyond that minimum threshold.ⁱ If a parent registers their child shortly after birth, the child can receive up to sixty free books for their home library. Families can bond over sharing books together. Even if a parent or caregiver cannot read, simply talking about the pictures and making up stories to go with the pictures allows them to be a big part of their child's future success.

Growing Books from Birth's Impact

Over the past four and a half years, PGCMLS has reached over 23,000 children under the age of five with existing local Books from Birth funding.

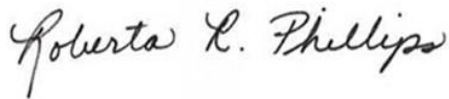
- Prince George's County families have received 480,000 free books.
- 8,583 children have "graduated"/aged out of the program and around 2,000 have moved out of our county.
- Currently, 13,000 children are actively receiving free books on a monthly basis.

As PGCMLS continue to reach a growing population of children (the 2020 Census indicates that Prince George's County is home to 62,800+ children under age 5,) and more children register for our program, the support from Prince George's County has not been able to increase to accommodate the growing number of books required to be sent out monthly. In fact, our local budget has been cut because of budget austerity measures. **The state funding proposed under SB 438 will allow PGCMLS to continue to keep up with the growing demand for more books as more families register. It will also help other public library systems in Maryland establish or grow their similar programs.** PGCMLS and Maryland's libraries wish to continue to be a positive force in strengthening children and their families through bonding over books.

I invite you to watch an interview [with Tiffany](#), a dedicated mother of two children from Prince George's County. Tiffany shares how her two year old Isaiah has recently started pointing to the pictures in the book, "Truck Stop". As he points, she identifies the types of trucks for him. Since this was a recent development in his interaction with books, she is excited to share with him and use different voices for different characters. Isaiah is learning print awareness, vocabulary, letter recognition, sound awareness and is bonding with his mother. His older sister, Gabriella often joins in sharing books together. This is a wonderful example of how parents are their child's first and best teacher, as well as how older siblings play an important role. (See wonderful interaction between Mom and son at 1 min 50s)

Thank you for considering this important bill that will continue to address the opportunity gap for young Marylanders. If our children get extra support for developing their literacy skills they will have a greater chance of succeeding in school and pursuing their dreams. Please feel free to contact me at roberta.phillips@pgcmls.info if I may be of any further assistance.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Roberta L. Phillips". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent 'R' and 'P'.

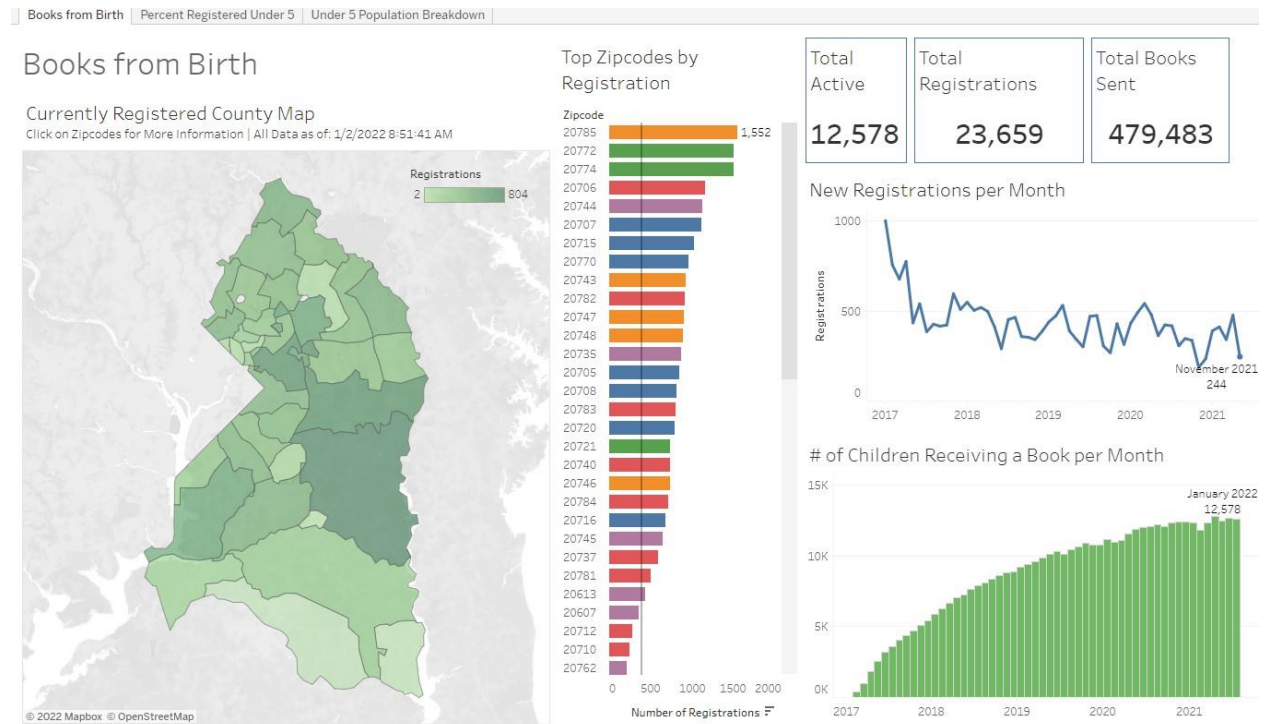
Roberta Phillips
Chief Executive Officer

APPENDIX

Resident Testimonials

- “Our kids love receiving the books monthly!”
- “Thank you so much for sending books to our son since he was a baby. He has loved reading each one of them.”
- “We love our imagination library books!”
- “We are all really enjoying the books you select each month and greatly appreciate this service. Thank you so, so much. As a fellow librarian, I am especially grateful to you for all you do!!!”
- “We appreciated the program while we were using it, so thank you for this service! I have recommended it to fellow parents as well.”
- “My children love these books and I appreciate this program.”
- “Our son looks forward to reading new books so much.”
- “We did love the books that our daughter received through this program -- many continue to be her favorites now.”

PGCMLS Books from Birth Data Dashboard (February 2022)



ⁱ University of Nevada, Reno. (2010, May 21). Books in home as important as parents' education in determining children's education level. *ScienceDaily*. Retrieved February 4, 2022 from www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2010/05/100520213116.htm)