



House Bill 685

Education – Regional Resource Centers and Libraries – Funding

MACo Position: **SUPPORT**

To: Ways and Means Committee

Date: February 24, 2022

From: Brianna January

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **SUPPORTS** HB 685. This bill would update the minimum required state and local funding for libraries and would better align the state's financial support to recognize the expanded role libraries play.

Libraries and regional resource centers increasingly serve growing purposes for Maryland's communities. Maryland's families seek these unique public institutions for educational and childcare support, access to technological resources and high-quality internet, labor and employment aid, and cultural enrichment. In essence, libraries and regional resource centers are a critical nexus of resources, community engagement, and enrichment unique to other community infrastructure – and the COVID-19 pandemic has only exacerbated the need for maintaining and deepening the role they play in Maryland's communities. In short, our libraries and regional resource centers serve many more purposes for their communities than their original charge.

With an expanded purpose, however, comes greater need, which counties deeply understand. Local governments have long histories of exceeding mandated funding requirements and equipping public libraries with financial and operation support more than these requirements. In fact, Baltimore City and all 23 county governments currently fund their respective libraries above the current required minimum set in state law. They proudly do so because they know the success of local governments hinges on that of the families and communities they serve.

Unfortunately, state support has lagged behind that provided by local governments, despite the growing need. HB 685 offers an opportunity for the State to realign its financial support of these critical facilities with the level of support offered by local governments.

Counties welcome increased partnership and support from the State, especially at a time when libraries and regional resource centers are serving new and evolving roles in their communities that necessitate deeper investment. For these reasons, MACo **SUPPORTS** HB 685 and urges a **FAVORABLE** report.