March 28, 2023

Chairman Benjamin Barnes
House Appropriations Committee
House Office Building

Dear Chairman Barnes and members of the Appropriation Committee:

I am the Chief Operating Officer of the Enoch Pratt Free Library and I strongly support **SB 501 Libraries – Aging Infrastructure Improvement Grant Program** which would provide much-needed capital funding for library systems across the state.

Libraries are vital community hubs, helping to stabilize neighborhoods and providing a world of opportunities to users. In Baltimore City, where access to the internet is limited or non-existent for our customers, we help bridge that digital divide. Through partnerships with Legal Aid, the University of Maryland School of Social Work, and Morgan State, our customers can access social work and legal services in the community. Our presence in the community allows learners of all ages access to information, and our meeting rooms allow non-profit groups space to meet on essential topics for the community.

The Enoch Pratt Free Library operates one of the oldest library systems in the United States, operating out of 19 locations that are more than 50 years old (six are over 100 years old). The deferred maintenance at those locations has resulted in the need to close libraries for long periods. In the last 18 months, we lost approximately 2,200 public service hours due to failing heating and air conditioning systems. There is significant need to address ADA and building code deficiencies. Library spaces need modernization to allow for library services required today, flexible spaces that meet each community's needs. We maximize capital funding resources to the best of our ability but there simply is not enough funding to address the need.

I fully support SB 501 and urge the committee to issue a favorable report that could result in improved library facilities that will serve Baltimore City customers for years to come.

Thank you very much for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Gordon E. Krabbe
Chief Operating Officer