

BILL: Senate Bill 501 DATE: March 1, 2023

SUBJECT: Libraries - Aging Infrastructure **COMMITTEE:** Budget and Taxation

Capital Improvement Grant Program - Established

SPEAKER: Irene Padilla **POSITION:** Favorable

Imagine having to wait outside for other patrons to leave a library before you could enter. Or being one of hundreds of children turned away each year because your library's meeting room was limited to fifteen.

Visitors to the 2,800-square-foot North East branch, which served 26,000 people, faced these challenges for years. The space was that small.

On April 23, 2021 Cecil County dedicated a new 43,000-square-foot facility to provide 21st-century library service. And not a moment too soon. A 90% increase in population is projected between 2005 and 2040, and yet the project stalled for years until sand local funding could be secured.

The new building features an early literacy center and is walkable from the middle and elementary schools, welcoming children of all ages to a variety of new spaces and programs. Maryland is one state of 15 that provides funding for the construction of library buildings, and Cecil County's is the 19th facility made possible by the County Library Capital Grant Program, enacted unanimously in 2008.

State and local support for Maryland public libraries is a model for our nation, and we are thankful for it, however, there simply isn't enough funding to meet the infrastructure needs of libraries in every community.

In some areas, like the Charlotte Hall Library in St. Mary's County, a 40-year old building with few electrical outlets, there are no sources to match state funding.

Before the 50-year old Annapolis Library was closed, snow on the roof caused 38 leaks and the branch's closure for 10 weeks. The new Michael E. Busch Annapolis Library, which opened in 2020, was the first new library in the county in 16 years and took 20 years to be funded and built.

During the 2021 session, the General Assembly increased the annual state funding mandate for the library grant program from \$5 million to \$7.5 million. But even at this level, it will take 20 years to meet the *immediate* needs of Maryland's libraries.

And while new libraries are a reason for celebration, the majority of grants are awarded to smaller, but critical, projects like the renovation of the Hampden Library in Baltimore City, which did not have a public restroom.

Providing inclusive places to gather is a core principle of public libraries. We offer equitable access to educational advancement, economic opportunity, and lifeline services for all. This funding would enable us to complete more robust upgrades to our oldest branches, exponentially increase the supply of borrowable technology and internet access, and dutifully ensure the staffing needed to meet community needs.

The Maryland State Library Agency (MSLA) has established procedures to receive requests and distribute State capital funding through the annual County Library Capital Grant Program. Since the inception of the grant program in FY 2008, the number of annual awards has varied from 20 to 4 projects.

More than half of the 191 public library buildings in Maryland are over twenty five (25) years old. Consequences of this aging infrastructure are: 5 buildings need a new roof, 3 facilities require alterations for ADA compliance, 4 libraries have HVAC systems that are at the end of their useful life, 26 buildings require technological upgrades in order to provide 21st century library services, 23 existing facilities require general renovation, and 6 buildings have been identified for replacement with a new structure. The total estimated cost of these projects is \$424.38 million.

With the escalation of construction costs, grant requests have become larger, thereby decreasing the number of projects/geographic diversity in the distribution of awards.

While the allocation of an additional \$40 million annually is more than 5 times the total allocation of \$7.5 million annually for the existing statewide program, it will not significantly increase the total number of projects being managed by the agency or require additional staff. Since requests are capped at 2 per system under the proposed legislation, the maximum number of requests could not exceed 48 projects.

However, smaller library systems may not be able to manage or match more than one project in a single fiscal year.

The agency anticipates fewer, but larger, requests under this proposed legislation since the minimum request is \$500,000. Under the current grant program the minimum request is \$20,000.

Let's build on Maryland's commitment to its residents so we can strengthen and sustain our library infrastructure for generations to come.