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Senate Capital Budget and Taxation Committee
Libraries - Aging Infrastructure Capital Improvement Grant Program - Established
February 28, 2023, Support SB0501

Senator Guy J. Guzzone, Chair
Senator Jim Rosapepe, Vice Chair
Budget & Taxation Committee
3 West, Miller Senate Office Building

Dear Senator Guzzone, Senator Rosapepe, and Distinguished Members of the Committee:

The Talbot County Free Library fully supports SB0501, Libraries - Aging Infrastructure Capital Improvement Grant Program. The funding in this bill is critical to library building and renovation projects across the state which will support long-term improvements to library facilities. Funding provided by this act would help libraries to better serve underserved and distressed communities, low-income and rural areas, people with disabilities, and vulnerable library users including children and seniors. As our country continues to grapple with economic impacts for families including inflation and a possible recession, we must look forward and begin to craft solutions to support everyone in our community. During times of economic hardship, library services are unique and essential to the economic recovery of our community and in particular to individuals who rely on job search assistance, career skill building services and resources, small business resources and much more that public libraries provide. As trusted centers of community life and essential infrastructure, libraries are a perfect place to start.

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. Most libraries do not request or receive the entire amount of State funds for which they are eligible. 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. Small, rural library systems like TCFL are not able to 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. The minimum request is \$20,000 under the current grant program

In order for small, rural library buildings to remain vibrant, sustainable, and highly responsive to our communities who rely on them, we need the additional funding that SB0501 would provide. As the director of a public library system that has been awarded \$1,360,000 in design and construction funds through the Maryland Library Capital Grant Program for two library expansion projects, I can attest to the success of capital grant funding for libraries over the past 17 years. This program has helped the Talbot County Free Library system leverage over a million dollars in local funding to expand and renovate the Easton Library in 2011 and to help fund design for the expansion and renovation of the St. Michaels Library in 2023.

The additional funding included in this bill is needed for the construction of the renovation and expansion of the St. Michaels Library which is a busy public hub that plays a key role in our community, providing diverse library materials, programs for patrons of all ages, and computers and Wi-Fi access that assists with job seeking and other information needs. The existing facility, at 7500 SF, is inadequate in size to provide for the needs of our thriving community and has inadequate spaces for children and teens. Our citizens would benefit tremendously from an expanded library that has infrastructure that supports the technological needs of our residents and visitors, rectifies accessibility issues in the building, has larger meeting rooms, expands the children's and teen areas, adds additional computers, improves digital infrastructure, and provides for additional collection space, all of which will allow the library to better respond to customer demands today and in the future. Funding from the state is essential for the project to move forward so that the library may continue to serve the diverse needs of the community.

Investing in libraries is investing in employment, literacy, health, and the overall economy of all counties and jurisdictions in Maryland. I respectfully request that you fully support the additional funding included in SB0501. Thank you very much for your continued support of Maryland libraries.

Sincerely,

Dana Newman
Director