



<b>BILL:</b>	Senate Bill 501	<b>DATE:</b>	March 1, 2023
<b>SUBJECT:</b>	Libraries - Aging Infrastructure Capital Improvement Grant Program - Established	<b>COMMITTEE:</b>	Budget and Taxation
<b>SPEAKER:</b>	Jennifer Ranck	<b>POSITION:</b>	Favorable

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in full support of SB 501. This Grant Program provides the necessary framework to support the current and growing capital needs of libraries throughout the state. More than half of the 191 public libraries in Maryland are over twenty-five years old. Infrastructure needs range from roof replacements to technological upgrades to general renovations, and six buildings have been identified for replacement. The total estimated cost for statewide projects exceeds \$424 million.

The Maryland State Library Agency has developed procedures to receive requests and distribute State capital funding through the annual County Library Capital Grant Program. As project costs have escalated, grant requests have become larger, thereby decreasing the number of projects and geographic diversity in the distribution of awards. This funding would enable us to complete more robust upgrades to our oldest branches and ensure that all Maryland communities have access to 21st century library service.

For the Worcester County Library, this legislation is particularly timely. We are in the design phase for a new library branch to serve Pocomoke and the southern end of our County, replacing a nearly 53 year old building. Although we have a wonderful Maintenance Department, last winter the branch lost heat on four different occasions. Attendance for our larger family programs is often limited because we lack adequate meeting space. There are only a couple of spots where patrons can easily plug in their own laptops and devices. Outlets are hidden behind bookshelves and often staff will see clever teens on the floor charging their tablets after school. Our most recent cost estimate completed in January 2023 shows a project total of \$9,354,000. This funding will enable our library to expand collections, programming space, study rooms, and technology resources to one of the neediest areas in our County. Twenty percent of children in Pocomoke live below the poverty line. A new high performance, low maintenance building with inspirational areas for learning and enjoyment will impact our community for years to come.

Libraries touch the lives of thousands of people, of all ages, every day. I respectfully request that you fully support SB 501.