

Brandon M. Scott
Mayor



Chris Ryer
Director

March 1, 2023

Chairman Senator Guy J. Guzzone
Budget & Taxation Committee
3 West, Miller Senate Office Building

Dear Chairman Guzzone and members of the Budget & Taxation Committee:

I am writing to voice my strong support for **SB 502 Enoch Pratt Free Library – Capital Project Funding** which would provide much needed capital funding for the Enoch Pratt Free Library. Libraries are vital community hubs, helping to stabilize neighborhoods and providing a world of opportunities to customers. In Baltimore City, where access to the internet is limited or non-existent for up to 40% of households, the Pratt Library is helping bridge the digital divide. Through partnerships with Maryland Legal Aid, the University of Maryland School of Social Work and School of Nursing, as well as Morgan State University, Pratt customers can get access to social workers, legal services, and healthcare consultations right in their own community. The Pratt gives learners of all ages free access to information and resources. The Library meeting rooms allow non-profit groups to gather and discuss essential optics for the community.

The Enoch Pratt Free Library operates one of the oldest library systems in the United states. 19 library locations are more than 50 years old, six are over a century old. The deferred maintenance at these locations has resulted in lengthy closures, depriving entire communities of library resources for months at a time. In the last 18 months alone, the Pratt *lost approximately 2,200 public service hours* due to failing heating and air conditioning systems. In addition, many libraries are not ADA compliant and have building code deficiencies. The Pratt needs funding to modernize library spaces to meet the growing demands of the community.

This bill is particularly important as it would leverage the City's annual capital funding for the library to match \$10 million in State funding. This would allow the library to continue providing critical services to Baltimore's citizens and maintain the necessary infrastructure. The library system is currently undertaking an assessment of its facilities, which will allow it to use these funds for strategic and responsible improvements to its branches.

In conclusion, we strongly support Senate Bill 502 and would like to ask you to give it favorable consideration. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions or if we can provide any further information.

Thank you very much for your consideration.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Chris Ryer", with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Chris Ryer, Director