

Senate

Education, Energy and the Environment

SB 300 Baltimore City Young Readers Program- Expansion and Alteration

February 22, 2023

Dear Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and members of the Committee,

I am writing in support of SB300, the Young Readers Expansion Act of 2023. I want to especially thank Delegate Korman, for his initial leadership to champion early childhood education and access by introducing last year's Baltimore City Young Readers Program, and his foresight in working with the Maryland State Library Agency and public library systems across our state to expand the program through this act.

As a librarian, an educator, and a parent, I have experienced firsthand the impact that access to books and literacy has, early in a child's life. I, along with many experts, believe that within the critical window of birth to age 5 is the greatest opportunity to impact a person's long term development and success in life. It's why so many of the public library's program's are directed at children and caregivers at this stage of human development. So often, we are the first point of contact for that child and their family to engage with books and learning. And for many in our state who cannot afford to purchase books or travel to museums or enrichment centers for learning and exploration, we are the only point of contact.

Research from a 2010 study on family culture and educational success determined that children with books in the home will perform better in school and in life. A child growing up in a home with just 25 books will, on average, complete two more years of school than would a child from a home without any books at all. In Cecil County, we used this research to create one of our most impactful early literacy outreach programs in partnership with PNC Bank's Grow Up Great Foundation. Now more than a decade in existence, our My Special Book program has placed more than 10,000 books into the homes of pre-school age children in low-income communities and neighborhoods that they get to keep as a way to start building their own home libraries. For so many of the children I've met through this program, this is the first book they've ever owned, and they are just incredulous that they get to keep it. The pride with which they write their name in their book is truly something to behold. Prior to the pandemic, the My Special Book, and other library programs, proved integral in helping to increase our county's percentage of children who were kindergarten ready. Our county has historically struggled with this and has had one of the lowest percentages in the state, which is now exacerbated by the effects of pandemic learning loss.

By expanding the Young Readers program across the state, we will be able to continue our work to move the needle on early childhood education, both through our library's programs as well as in partnership with our local women's civic league, who recently launched a Dolly Parton Imagination Library program that serves approximately 1,000 children out of the 6,000 children age birth through 5 in Cecil County, but is unable to expand based on funding limitations. With the modest investment of these funds, we will be able to yield positive returns that impact our children and our state for generations, ensuring that no Marylander is left behind. I ask that you join Delegate Korman, Senator McCray, public librarians, and parents everywhere in supporting access to early learning and literacy throughout our state by giving SB300 a favorable reading. Thank you.

Morgan Miller
Executive Director