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Ways and Means Committee

SB 300 Baltimore City Young Readers Program – Expansion Act of 2023

February 22, 2023

Support

Dear Chairman Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and Committee Members,

I am writing in support of SB 300: Baltimore City Young Readers Program – Expansion Act of 2023. As the Director of the Queen Anne's County Library I have first-hand knowledge of the impact participation in the Dolly Parton Imagination Library has on a child's ability to enter school ready to learn. In 2018 we were fortunate to partner with our local Judy Center to provide access to the Dolly Parton Imagination Library for our under 5 population. The impact was significant. In the 2017/2018 school year, 48% of Queen Anne's County children entered kindergarten ready to learn. Just one year later, after implementing the Dolly Parton Imagination Library program, 57% of Queen Anne's County children entered kindergarten ready to learn, an increase of 18.75%. Studies show that the single most important activity parents can do to get their children ready to read and learn is to read out loud to them. The number of words a child knows upon entering school is a key indicator of future school success. The Dolly Parton Imagination Library puts the books into the hands of parents so they can model reading as a behavior and increase their children's vocabulary. During the pandemic, when schools were closed to students, this service was needed more than ever.

The cost of the Dolly Parton Imagination Library can be a detriment to libraries being able to participate. For every child enrolled in the program, the cost is \$25 per year until the child ages out at 5 years old. Committing to the program means making hard decisions about other services that may not have resources to continue. The funding in this bill will be crucial to our ability to continue to provide this program. Currently, we are fortunate enough to get a small grant from the Queen Anne's County Commissioners to help support our program. In FY 2023 that funding is \$10,000, but the cost of the program each year has been between \$20,000 and \$24,000. In our most impoverished area, only 7.7% of children eligible for this program are enrolled. With launch of our new Mobile Library service this year, we have been able to bring information about the Dolly Parton Imagination Library service directly to the families who need it the most and we have already seen an increase in the number of applications for the service. The 50% matching funds would ensure that this valuable service would continue for our residents.

I ask the committee to support SB 300 so that all Maryland Public Libraries will have this funding available to support participation in the Dolly Parton Imagination Library statewide.

Sincerely,

Janet Salazar
Director
Queen Anne's County Library