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Appropriations Committee

Subcommittees

Capital Budget

Oversight Committee on Personnel

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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Young Readers Program Expansion Act of 2023 (HB 243)
Testimony of Delegate Marc Korman—Favorable with Amendments

Thank you Madam Chair, Madam Vice Chair and members of the Ways & Means Committee. I come before you to present the **Young Readers Program Expansion Act of 2023 (HB 243)**. In 2022 the General Assembly created the Young Readers Matching Grant Program, a state matching grant program for Imagination Library-type programs, which provides children under five with a free book a month (HB 383 of 2022). This year's bill would move the program from the Governor's Office of Crime Control & Prevention (GOCCP) and put it in the Maryland State Library Agency and increase the annual funding to \$500,000 (from \$250,000). The Baltimore City Young Readers Program, which has operated under the GOCCP since 2016, will also be moved to the State Library but will otherwise remain the same.

The State Library is a much more appropriate agency to run the Young Readers Matching Grant Program and is better suited to promote early childhood literacy. In several other states, library agencies operate such programs and twelve states offer some type of matching financial support for early reader nonprofits.

Ninety percent of a child's brain is developed by the age of 5, making it a critical development window. Early reader nonprofits such as Imagination Library have a substantial impact on child literacy development and are backed by years of data and supporting evidence. Some of the measurable impacts include a 29 percent increase in children ready for kindergarten, significantly higher reading skills, and higher scores on reading achievement tests.

The bill increases the annual financial support for the statewide Young Readers Matching Grant Program to \$500,000. The increased support for the matching grant program will allow the early reader nonprofits to expand their service to more eligible children. Although there are 364,488 children in Maryland that are eligible for the program, only 33,917 (9 percent) are currently enrolled. Expanding the Young Readers Program would help increase the number of children enrolled because of the funding it would provide to eligible locations throughout Maryland.

The increased funding represents a critical safety net for the local programs so that they are not reliant entirely on private funding which is unpredictable from year to year. The fund incentivizes prioritizing children in zip codes with a disproportionate number of low-income residents and obtaining local government support as well.

We are submitting a technical amendment for your consideration that clarifies that the Baltimore City Young Readers Program will remain the same except for being moved to the State Library.

It is up to us to ensure every child in Maryland has access to quality books regardless of their economic status. Supporting the statewide Young Readers Matching Grant Program will promote early childhood literacy and help instill a lifelong love of reading. I urge a favorable report.