



BILL: House Bill 1115 **DATE:** March 8, 2023
SUBJECT: Libraries – Regional Resource **COMMITTEE:** Ways and Means
Centers – Governance
Requirements
SPEAKER: Irene Padilla **POSITION:** Favorable

EXPLANATION

The Maryland State Library Agency (MSLA) is in support of HB 1115 and encourages a favorable review. This bill brings Maryland’s regional libraries into compliance with community-based, principled governance structures that employ best practices for a non-profit entity funded by taxpayers.

There are three regional libraries that support the regional resource center network. The Eastern Shore Regional Library, Inc. (ESRL) in Salisbury was established in 1992 as a 501(c)(3) non-profit library corporation and represents the libraries in Caroline, Dorchester, Kent, Queen Anne’s, Somerset, Talbot, Wicomico and Worcester counties. The Southern Maryland Regional Library Association, Inc. in Charlotte Hall was established in 1959 as a 501(c)(3) non-profit corporation and represents the libraries in Calvert, Charles and St. Mary’s counties. The Western Maryland Regional Library in Hagerstown was established in 1967 as a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization and represents the libraries in Allegany, Garrett and Washington Counties. WMRL is administered through a MOU between the participating libraries in the region and the Washington County Free Library (WCFL). The Maryland State Library Agency is responsible for oversight of the regional resource centers.

In 1957, the Maryland Code, § 23-202, Regional Resource Centers (RRC) statute was passed into law. The law worked very well for decades, as the regional libraries were a very small part of library services for the counties they served. Today, the regional libraries have evolved into a major influential force for those county library systems they support. While Maryland’s regional libraries are in compliance with community-based, principled governance structures that employ best practices for a non-profit entity funded by taxpayers, it became apparent that the law governing regional libraries has not evolved and the need for updating the law became a priority for the Maryland State Library Board.

The proposed bill reflects adaptive regional libraries whose trustees’ valued skill sets directly contribute to mission accomplishment and to the libraries’ prominence in their region. Community-based membership allows regional libraries to recruit board members who can advance the regional library agenda--e.g., community leaders, attorneys, financial experts, fundraisers, and advocates. This broadens and elevates the regional library as an entity mindful of larger community issues--e.g., economic development, health, transportation, and public safety--versus looking internally to county library issues.

This proposed bill updates the following: roles and responsibilities of the governing boards, officer qualifications, term limits, meeting guidelines, attendance guidelines, and the role of library management staff. As a result of this bill, there will be even greater input from both participating libraries and the community as to what services are needed from the regional libraries.

Dedicated, per capita funding for regional libraries will continue. Library certifications and participation in the state pension system will be maintained. No change is anticipated in the duties of the regional libraries. Local control of library funding, policies, and operations also continues.

MSLA fully supports the passage of this bill.