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BILL:	House Bill 0243	DATE:	February 8, 2023
SUBJECT:	Baltimore City Young Readers Program – Expansion and Alterations 3 (Young Readers Program Expansion Act of 2023)	COMMITTEE:	Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs
SPEAKER:	Tamar Sarnoff, PhD	POSITION:	Favorable

EXPLANATION

The Maryland State Library Agency (MSLA) is in support of HB 243, and encourages a favorable review. Funding for this program will have a widespread positive impact across the state, and MSLA is in the best position to manage the distribution of these funds.

There are currently 17 county-level Young Readers Programs across Maryland, providing materials to about 37,000 children, or 10% of all children under five in Maryland. The expansion of the Young Readers Program as described in HB 243 would subsidize the distribution of new books every month to more than 35,000 additional Maryland children under five, nearly doubling the number of children who currently participate in a Young Readers Program.

Initiatives such as the Young Readers Program are gaining in popularity around the country. Washington, DC, as well as nearly every county abutting Maryland host similar programs. Providing funds to expand the Young Readers Program statewide would make Maryland more appealing to families relocating to and within the Delmarva area. This program will enhance the workforce *now* by attracting professionals with young families, and *in a generation* when Maryland's youth who participate in the program join the workforce. Several studies have shown that programs such as the Dolly Parton Imagination Library have a positive impact on young children on metrics such as: Early Reading Skills, School Readiness, Language and Life Skills Development and Parent Engagement. This early learning and reading program will help Maryland's children gain confidence in reading and learning, and in turn, better prepare Maryland's children to be successful students. Maryland's students who are better prepared for school are more likely to successfully participate in the Maryland workforce.

The Maryland State Library Agency (MSLA) is prepared to take responsibility for the management of this program. The purpose, scope and operational aspects of the program align with those of the agency. MSLA and the Maryland public library systems provide extensive services and resources to children under five. Pursuant to COMAR 23-410, "Service offerings required by public libraries", among the responsibilities of public libraries in Maryland, libraries are responsible for providing programs designed to increase scores on the kindergarten assessment, as well as programs designed to close learning gaps created by lack of access to education. HB 243 will address these goals.

Around the state, public libraries lend millions of early reader materials at each of nearly 200 locations. In fiscal year 2021, Maryland public libraries hosted more than 175,000 attendees at 4,800 preschool programs. MSLA supports training and professional development opportunities for those serving the youngest Marylanders, as well as providing direct service through programs such as the Day-by-Day Early Literacy calendar, with daily age appropriate activities and information about Maryland, and Hatchlings, which teaches early literacy skills to expectant parents and parents of newborns.

The Young Readers Program expansion benefits all of Maryland. MSLA and Maryland public libraries are experts on early learning efforts, and MSLA is capable of taking ownership of this program. MSLA fully supports the passage of this bill.