

Testimony in FAVOR of

SB 434 Public Libraries – State Library Resource Center- Funding

January 30, 2024

Dear Chairman Guzzone and Committee Members,

I am writing in my capacity as a member of the Board of Trustees for the Kent County Public Library to express my strong support for SB 434 Public Libraries – State Library Resource Center – Funding. The State Library Resource Center (SLRC henceforth) provides an invaluable service to our state as well as small, rural counties like the one where I reside.

SLRC provides a myriad of services including free, in-person and virtual trainings to help Maryland Librarians maintain ongoing professional development, the interlibrary loan system, access to educational databases, and programming for the general public. Kent County is one of the smallest counties in the state. We cannot afford many of the resources provided by SLRC on our own. They have provided our librarians with vital training and expanded our citizens' access to e-books and other digital services. SLRC has also supported the community by providing services for job seekers, safe spaces for after school, and free computer/Internet access. Aside from these services, investment in libraries helps communities in other ways. A forthcoming article from the *American Economic Journal* (Gilpin et al.) finds that increases in capital investments for public libraries increase library visits, children's attendance at library events, and circulation of children's books. These increases, in turn, are correlated with improved test scores of students in the surrounding school districts.

Data also demonstrates that there is substantial demand for library services. A new report from the American Library Association show that Millennials and Gen Z are especially likely to use the library's resources via digital offerings and in-person visits. The data used for the report show 54% of Gen Z and Millennials had visited a physical library in the past 12 months. The survey also polled respondents on whether they considered themselves readers. Of those who identified as "non-readers" more than half had visited their local library in the last year to utilize other services to get help and attend events to "connect and collaborate." Use of SLRC's services in FY 2023 are significant. The library was visited nearly 214,000 times, answered more than 286,000 reference questions, facilitated more than 72,000 interlibrary loans, circulated more than 345,000 items, and provided access to specialized databases over 9.3 million times, which represents a 30% increase from the previous year. It is clear that people see the library as an important resource and are utilizing all that it has to offer.

Investment in our libraries is an investment in education, equity, community outreach, child development, and local economies. Such investments also keep our population engaged and thriving. I respectfully ask that you support SB 434.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Rachel M. Durso, PhD
Trustee, Kent County Public Library