



January 31, 2025

HB597 (FAV)

Dear Chair Barnes, Vice Chair Chang, and Members of the House Appropriations Committee,

Let's be blunt: libraries are under siege. Not in the dramatic, culture-war sense that dominates our political discourse, but in the slow erosion of resources, in the quiet tightening of budgets that forces these institutions—these cornerstones of a literate and democratic society—to do more with less.

HB 597 is not about luxury. It's not even about expansion. It is about survival. The Maryland State Library Resource Center (SLRC) is the backbone of library services across the state, providing not just books, but training, high-speed broadband, interlibrary loans, and databases that serve the entire ecosystem of public, academic, and school libraries. This is infrastructure, as vital to intellectual life as roads are to commerce.

Let's talk numbers. Right now, Maryland invests a mere \$2.07 per resident in SLRC. That's what we spend annually to ensure equitable access to research materials, archival records, and digital resources for everyone—from schoolchildren to first responders using SLRC's SAILOR network. In FY24 alone, SLRC facilitated 355,120 material circulations, powered nearly 9 million database searches, and welcomed 284,000 visitors to its central location. This is a powerhouse of a public service.

Consider this: without SLRC's centralized purchasing power, Maryland's libraries and schools would have had to pay \$4.6 million for digital resources last year. Instead, SLRC secured them for just \$618,000. That is efficiency. That is smart governance. That is what we jeopardize if we fail to fund HB 597.

The numbers alone should be enough. But if they aren't, consider the principle. Libraries are a bulwark against inequality, a rare place where access is not determined by wealth or privilege. They preserve history, they disseminate knowledge, they anchor communities. To allow them to wither—to reduce their funding in real dollars while inflation eats away at their capacity—is not just short-sighted. It is, in the end, a quiet betrayal of everything a functioning democracy requires.

Pass HB 597. Fund SLRC. It is, quite simply, the least we can do.

Sincerely,

Seth Hershberger, Library Director