

NICHOLAS ALEXANDER BROWN-CÁCERES

nabconductor@gmail.com

nicholasalexanderbrown.com •  [nabrown88](https://www.linkedin.com/in/nabrown88)

February 10, 2025

The Honorable Brian J. Feldman
Chair, Senate Energy, Education and the Environment Committee
Maryland Senate
2 West Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

RE: SUPPORT for SB 378 - State Library Agency - Family Literacy Pilot Program - Establishment

Dear Chairman Feldman,

I am pleased to write on behalf of the Maryland State Library Board and as a library executive residing in Prince George's County to request your support for SB378 - State Library Agency - Family Literacy Pilot Program - Establishment. This bill will establish a family literacy partnership between the Maryland State Library Agency and the Department of Labor (which oversees education programs in correctional facilities, including the state's 12 prison librarians) to develop a three-year pilot at four correctional facility sites throughout the state. The pilot program will assist inmates in recording picture book stories for their children and grandchildren. When children read with loved ones they acquire vocabulary, see themselves reflected in the world, and strengthen their bonds with parents and guardians. These moments of connection can positively impact the children and adults, setting the children on a path for educational and career achievement in future years. Children and families will also benefit from increased engagement with the pilot library system. Wicomico County Public Library's partnership with the Wicomico County Correctional Center around the Storybook Program is a great model.

This pilot program will begin to serve families with young children who have a parent/guardian in prison. Over 32,000 individuals are incarcerated in Maryland, with an estimated 20,000 children in Baltimore alone having a parent who is incarcerated or on parole/probation. Across the nation, nearly half (47%) of the approximately 1.25 million people in state prisons are parents of minor children, and about 1 in 5 (19%) of those children is age 4 or younger.

Family Literacy Programs also promote reading among inmates, where 70% of inmates are functionally illiterate, according to National Adult Literacy Survey data. Many incarcerated individuals share that they never read to or had books at home. In addition to helping develop family bonding and interest in reading for both the inmates and the children at home, Family Literacy programs build home libraries and print-rich environments, which leads to greater awareness of print and an interest in reading.

As a Prince George's County resident, I appreciate Senator Washington's bill sponsorship. When I served as the COO for Communication and Outreach at the Prince George's County Memorial Library System, I championed the important work of our County Correctional Center Library in meeting the needs of incarcerated Marylanders daily. The family literacy partnership proposed in SB378 is an outstanding opportunity to give Marylanders in the justice system and their families an opportunity to connect in a way that strengthens family ties and advances youth literacy.

This pilot program supports the Moore-Miller Administration's priorities to end childhood poverty by ending cycles and helping create sustained long-term wealth, setting Maryland's students up for success, creating an equitable, robust, and competitive economy, and creating safer communities.

Thank you for your tremendous and sustained support of the essential role that public libraries play in supporting Marylanders' daily education, enrichment, and social services needs. The Family Literacy Pilot Program aims to continue the good work of Maryland Libraries in giving some of our most vulnerable neighbors—the children of incarcerated adults—an early opportunity to develop literacy skills.

Most sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Nick Brown-Caceres', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Nicholas Alexander Brown-Cáceres

Member at-Large, Maryland State Library Board

Chair, American Library Association Public Awareness Committee