



Re: Support for SB 378 – Family Literacy Partnership Pilot Program

Dear Senator Brian J. Feldman and Senator Alonzo T. Washington

On behalf of the Maryland Book Bank, I am writing to express our strong support for SB 378, which seeks to establish a Family Literacy Partnership Pilot Program between the Maryland State Library Agency (MSLA) and the Department of Labor. This initiative will play a transformative role in strengthening family bonds, promoting literacy, and fostering educational opportunities for incarcerated individuals and their children.

The Maryland Book Bank is dedicated to increasing equitable access to books and literacy resources for children and families across the state, and we recognize the critical importance of family engagement in literacy development. SB 378 will help address the literacy gap among incarcerated individuals by providing opportunities for them to record picture book stories for their children, creating a meaningful connection between parents and children through the power of storytelling.

With an estimated 32,000 individuals incarcerated in Maryland—many of whom are parents—this program has the potential to positively impact thousands of children who face the challenges of parental incarceration. Research shows that nearly 47% of individuals in state prisons are parents of minor children, and in Baltimore alone, approximately 20,000 children have a parent who is incarcerated or under supervision. These children are at higher risk of experiencing low self-esteem, emotional distress, and academic struggles. Providing them with access to recorded stories from their parents can be a source of comfort, stability, and encouragement.

Furthermore, SB 378 directly addresses the critical issue of illiteracy among incarcerated individuals, where 70% are functionally illiterate. Many incarcerated individuals have reported never being read to as a child or having books in their home. By encouraging reading among inmates and their families, this program not only builds home libraries and print-rich environments but also fosters a culture of literacy that can break cycles of educational disadvantage.

This pilot program will ensure that families remain connected, children continue to develop literacy skills, and incarcerated individuals gain a sense of purpose and hope for reintegration into society.

Additionally, SB 378 aligns with the Moore-Miller Administration's priorities, by supporting efforts to "end cycles of poverty, create long-term economic stability, improve educational outcomes, and build safer communities". The Maryland Book Bank strongly believes that investing in family literacy is an investment in stronger families, stronger education, and a stronger Maryland.

We urge you to support SB 378 and help bring this critical initiative to life. Thank you for your leadership and commitment to literacy, education, and family engagement.

Sincerely,

Mark Feiring
Founding Executive Director
The Maryland Book Bank