

SB 369 SUPPORT

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Public Libraries – Automated External Defibrillator Program 2 (Raymono A. Russell Act)

Senate Committee on Education, Energy, and the Environment

Wednesday, February 12, 2025 at 1:00pm

Dear Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan and members of the Education, Energy, and the Environment committee,

Compelled by the devastating loss of my husband, Raymono A. Russell, whose life might have been saved if an Automated External Defibrillator (AED) had been accessible when it was most needed, I am writing this letter in strong support of Senate Bill 369.

Ray, as we affectionately called him, was devoted to his family. He was a loving and protective husband and father who was quick-witted with a quiet, determined, and easy-going spirit. He was a civil servant, serving in the United States Postal Service since 2008. Ray was a die-hard Dallas Cowboys fan and an avid bowler. His strength and commitment to excellence were obvious in all that he did. He was well-respected by his family, friends, and associates.

Ray and I had been married for 23 years. We were just entering the empty nester stage of life... we were excited - thinking about and planning all the things we had postponed while raising children and tending to the daily churn of life. But on March 4, 2023 – which happens to be my birthday – our lives changed forever. Ray went to work like any other day. He stopped to deliver mail at the Crofton Public Library and used the restroom – as he often did. The rest of what I know came from reading the 911 transcript:

- A library patron found him unresponsive in the restroom.
- A library staff member called 911.
- The 911 operator asked the library staff member to take the AED to my husband.
- The library staff member said there was no AED available.

And, by the time help arrived, it was too late. As you can imagine, this was heart-breaking to read – mostly because the exchange seemed relatively routine: AEDs must be commonplace. But obviously, they are not. Needless to say, things have never been the same – my children have experienced depression, anxiety, and other challenges since the death of their father, my husband. My daughter will not be able to do what I and many others have been able to do – have their father walk them down the aisle. My son will not be able to learn from his dad as he grows and matures as a man and father navigating the complexities of this world.

Sudden cardiac arrest is a leading cause of death, claiming over 350,000 lives annually in the U.S. alone. It is well known that survival from out-of-hospital cardiac arrest is extremely time-sensitive. When a person has a cardiac arrest, survival depends on immediately receiving CPR from someone nearby. Studies show that survival rates drop by 10% with every passing minute without defibrillation. According to the American Heart Association, the rapid use of an AED and CPR increase the chances of survival by 80%. Currently, only about 40% of people who experience an out-of-hospital cardiac arrest receive the immediate help that they need before professional help arrives. This lack of help leads to the estimate of 1 in 1,000 individuals experiencing cardiac related sudden death – *death that could be potentially prevented with greater AED accessibility*. And while most of the sudden cardiac arrests that AEDs can help, occur in adults; they can also occur in children and adolescents. But for AEDs to save lives, they must be available, visible, and accessible in public spaces. Today, I'm specifically asking for a library mandate.

In fact, the Springfield-Greene County, MO library system installed AEDs after experiencing 4 cardiac events in one year. While AEDs have an upfront cost, the price is minimal when compared to the value of a human life—or the lifelong grief of losing a loved one. Having a husband, father, brother, son, friend, or coworker not return home after simply going to work should never happen again if we have the tools to help those experiencing cardiac arrest.

The library, oft described as a community connection, resource, and gathering place for all ages, is instrumental and vital in our communities across the state. According to the most recent Maryland State Library Agency Annual Report, there were 12.3M visits and over 1 million event attendees, across 192 branches and 22 mobile library sites, in 2023 alone. These events and other library programs are designed for people of all ages – from toddlers and seniors to people with developmental and physical disabilities among others. AEDs in our public libraries can make a meaningful difference for millions of Marylanders.

It is hard to say this – I am not here for Ray - it is too late to save him. I am here for the countless others whose lives can be saved if we, together, create a future where AEDs are as common and accessible as fire extinguishers and smoke detectors. It is such a challenge to reconcile that if a simple law of the state requiring AEDs were in place, Ray would be alive today. I don't want any other family to endure the heartbreak my family has experienced. I ask that you please take this opportunity to act and mandate AEDs in libraries across our state by supporting the Raymono A. Russell Act. I want all Marylanders to have a fighting chance - an opportunity to survive and thrive should they face a sudden cardiac event. Simply put, the cost of this legislation is minimal, the value is priceless, and the cost of inaction is catastrophic.

I am grateful for your consideration, compassion, and leadership on this life-saving issue. I, along with my entire family, urge a favorable report on SB 369.