

BILL:	HB 415	DATE:	February 3, 2025
SUBJECT:	State Library Agency – Family Literacy Pilot Program – Establishment	COMMITTEE:	Ways and Means
TESTIMONY FROM:	Rachel Wright, Executive Director, Cecil County Public Library	POSITION:	Support

Dear Chair Atterbeary, Vice-Chair Wilkins, and Committee Members:

Cecil County Public Library (CCPL) fully supports **HB 415 – State Library Agency – Family Literacy Pilot Program – Establishment.**

Family literacy programs are a core offering of public libraries. They provide opportunities for children to connect in a positive, nurturing way with beloved parents and/or grandparents while also promoting the importance of literacy. Though public libraries across Maryland routinely make these opportunities available to the communities they serve, individuals who are incarcerated are excluded from the benefits of such participation. Establishing a family literacy program, as proposed by MSLA, fosters positive family engagement experiences and will make it possible for a parent/grandparent who is incarcerated to create a lasting connection with their loved ones while sharing books and reading.

Establishing a family literacy pilot program also demonstrates to children and their caregivers the community’s commitment to their success and well-being, proving that the incarceration of a parent/grandparent does not have to necessarily result in the severing of a connection between loved ones. Children of individuals who are incarcerated bear the negative impact of this separation in both measurable and immeasurable ways. A family literacy program provides the opportunity for families to stay connected to one another, to enjoy and appreciate reading together, and to feel supported by the greater community.

Providing funds needed to establish the Family Literacy Pilot Program will ensure children of incarcerated parents have the opportunity to engage in activities that promote family engagement and literacy- the benefits of which will extend far beyond the time it takes an individual who is incarcerated to record themselves reading a picture book. The impact that this will have on that child will be felt for years to come. 70% of inmates are functionally illiterate and many have shared that they were never read to and did not have access to books in their home. With the strong correlation between literacy and long-term economic and social outcomes, 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. Introducing positive literacy experiences into families can lead to new family traditions and experiences and end the very generational cycles the Moore-Miller Administration have committed to address.

Studies have shown that participation in a family literacy program has improved literacy outcomes for the individual who is incarcerated. Through this program, individuals can be motivated by the engagement and inspired by the opportunity to read to their loved one; thus leading them to a greater awareness of print and an

interest in reading. Therefore, improved literacy skills and/or interest in reading and learning can lead to more positive outcomes for the individual regardless of if/when they return to their community.

The establishment of a Family Literacy Pilot program will benefit the children, the individual who is incarcerated, and the entire community.

Please support **HB 415 – State Library Agency – Family Literacy Pilot Program – Establishment.**

Thank you for your ongoing support of Maryland libraries and communities.

Truly,



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