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House Ways and Means Committee
HB415 – State Library Agency – Family Literacy Pilot Program – Establishment
February 5, 2025
Support/Favorable

Dear Chair Atterbeary, Vice-Chair Wilkins, and members of the committee:

I am writing in support of HB415 – State Library Agency – Family Literacy Pilot Program – Establishment.

The legislation creates a family literacy partnership between the Maryland State Library Agency (MSLA) and the Department of Labor (which oversees education programs in correctional facilities, including the state's 12 prison librarians) to develop a 3-year pilot at 4 correctional facility sites situated throughout the state. The pilot program will assist inmates in recording picture book stories for their children and grandchildren. 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 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, competitive economy, and creating safer communities. Using general funds and possible added state funding, MSLA will partner with pilot library sites to develop and implement the program and administer grants to fund operating costs.

The Queen Anne's County Library already has an established partnership with the Queen Anne's County Detention Center to provide updated books for the center's library. This year we are expanding this partnership to provide some programs to help with resume building and job searching skills. We call this partnership the Empowerment Library and it was established using LSTA grant funds administered through MSLA. A pilot project such as the Family Literacy Program would be a natural next step in our partnership, should we be chosen as a pilot library site.

Family Literacy programs provide an opportunity to connect children with an incarcerated parent in a positive way. Studies show that creating a connection between a parent and child fosters family engagement. These Family Literacy programs help keep families together and increase the chances of a parent remaining in the home and connected to family upon release from prison. There is a strong correlation between literacy and long-term economic and social outcomes, including higher educational attainment and increased academic success, even when controlling for factors like parental education level and socioeconomic status.

Queen Anne's County Library supports the passage of HB415. I respectfully ask for your support of this budget item, which will help increase the literacy of the 32,000 incarcerated individuals in Maryland, help these families stay connected and engaged.

Thank you for your consideration,

Janet Salazar
Director