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**House Ways and Means
HB415 State Library Agency - Family Literacy Pilot Program - Establishment
February 3, 2025
Support**

Dear Chair Atterbeary and Committee Members,

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

The bill creates 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 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. 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.

There are approximately 32,000 individuals incarcerated in Maryland. 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 amongst inmates, where 70% of inmates are functionally illiterate, according to data from the National Adult Literacy Survey. Many incarcerated individuals share that they were never read to or had books in the 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. Children with a parent in prison may experience low self-esteem, depression, disturbed sleeping patterns, and symptoms of post-traumatic stress.

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. The Talbot County Free Library (TCFL) has had very good success with running book clubs in our local Talbot County detention center. TCFL will be providing our local detention center with pairs of picture books that incarcerated parents can read at the same time that their children read the book and then can have meaningful discussions of the book during visitation or a phone call with their child.

Thank you for your support of HB415. I ask that you favorably recommend it for passage.

Sincerely,

Dana Newman
Library Director