



**Testimony in support of HB1592: Education-Regional Resource Centers and County Libraries-Funding  
Hearing before the House Appropriation Subcommittee  
March 16, 2026  
Submitted by Tonya Aikens, Howard County Library System President & CEO**

Dear Chair Barnes, Vice Chair Kaiser, and Distinguished Members of the Committee:

I am writing to express support for **HB1592: Education-Regional Resource Centers and County Libraries-Funding**, which would ensure modest, periodic increases to per capita funding for each Maryland public library and regional library system through FY2032.

Maryland public libraries rely on the State for annual operating funding to support library staff, infrastructure, services, and programs. County library systems, on average, receive 18 percent of operating funds from the State, and regionals receive approximately 22 percent. In Howard County, we receive four percent, or \$1.3 million, of our operating funds from the State.

State funds are administered by the Maryland State Library Agency to all 24 Maryland public library systems and three regional systems. The current funding cycle is set to expire at the end of FY27, after which these systems will receive flat funding.

HB1592 extends the state share increases from FY28 to FY32 at an annual rate of increase of 3 percent for regionals and 3.21 percent for county library systems. Extending the State per capita increases provides the stability libraries need to effectively manage rising operating expenses and respond to increasing community demand for services. Without this extension, libraries may be forced to make difficult decisions about staffing, collections, and services.

Library services continue to evolve, and funding is essential for libraries to keep pace with increasing demand for its collections and services of all types for all people. Between 2014 and 2024 (the last year for which data is available):

- Public classes and programs:
  - The number of public programs and classes at Maryland public libraries increased by 32 percent (84,576 in 2024).
  - Attendance rose by 21 percent, from 1,788,330 to 2,171,049 – enough to fill M & T stadium 30 times over or Camden Yards 47 times over.
- WiFi:
  - In 2024, Marylanders accessed free public WiFi nearly 24 million times at public libraries, an increase of 657 percent.
- E-Books:
  - Maryland public libraries now offer nearly 4 million e-books, an increase of 1480 percent since 2014.

- The cost of e-books continues to increase, and the cost to provide sufficient materials to meet demand will outpace both inflation and state funding levels.

Over the past decade, the cost of providing library services has outpaced inflation\*, increasing 42 percent in county library systems and 37 percent in the regional resource centers. While the total number of library staff has only increased slightly (2.9 percent), the largest factor (57 percent) was the increased costs of salaries and wages (\$68 million). For those Maryland public libraries who rely on State funds to help cover salaries, this per capita increase is critical.

As living costs continue to rise, Maryland libraries continue to provide robust access to books and materials, the internet and other technology, buildings, programs, and services for every member of the community. Maryland public libraries' everyday work aligns with the Moore-Miller Administration's priorities focusing on several major areas, including:

- **Education:** Libraries provide classes, resources, and services for children and their caregivers, from birth through grade 12. *For our state's youngest learners, libraries are uniquely situated and qualified to help prepare children for kindergarten. Before children attend school, they attend classes at libraries.*
  - *For infants, toddlers, and preschoolers*, regularly occurring classes help children learn social-emotional skills and language skills. Children learn by singing, talking, reading, writing, and playing.
  - *For slightly older preschoolers*, children learn to be creative, get along with others, listen, and the foundations of reading, as well as the basics of letters, numbers, and vocabulary. Children explore science, technology, engineering, math, and art, supporting the development of physical motor skills.
  - *For K to 5 students*, library experiences enhance their school lessons—including math and science—through the use of children's literature and creative expression, which support the development of cognitive, social, and communication skills.
  - *For middle and high school students*, libraries provide homework help, research tools, tutoring, and practice tests for AP exams, SAT and ACT tests.
- **Lowering Costs:** Libraries offer a myriad of materials, services and resources to the community.
  - Libraries provide access to free practice tests for higher education and career certifications (e.g., SAT, ASVAB, Realtor, nursing school), free online skill-building courses (e.g., LinkedIn Learning), access to broadband, free or low-cost printing, and more.
  - Additionally, more than 3.3 million Marylanders hold public library cards and borrow more than 53 million items every year. For individuals and families working to stay within their budgets, free programs, family events, and learning opportunities at the library offer real relief. Every dollar saved by borrowing books and other materials from the library becomes a dollar freed to put groceries on the table.
- **Economic Competitiveness:** Libraries are frontline workforce development hubs, offering free access to job search tools, resume and interview support, digital skills training, career coaching, certification prep and small business resources – all in trusted, welcoming spaces that remove barriers. They not only help people find jobs, they also help them build long-term skills and confidence.
  - In Howard County, our Project Literacy's Career Pathways for Skilled Immigrants program provides English classes, pathways to an external high school diploma, workforce development counseling, and job-related workshops.

Continued funding to support small and rural libraries through State aid and the Regional Resource Centers is critical to supporting Marylanders. Regional libraries service small and rural libraries where local governments cannot fully fund the cost of operating them. Regionals work cooperatively to books, materials transit services,

technology, databases, training and other services to member libraries. These libraries are the first to experience economic downturns, and the most in need of library services.

Thank you for your longtime support of Maryland public libraries. We ask that you **favorably recommend HB1592** for passage.

Sincerely,

Tonya Aikens,  
President & CEO

*\*31.8 percent, according to [https://www.bls.gov/data/inflation\\_calculator.htm](https://www.bls.gov/data/inflation_calculator.htm)*