



March 16, 2026

Bill: House Bill 1592: Education - Regional Resource Centers and County Libraries - Funding/ Public Libraries – Young Readers Matching Grant Program, Funding, and Services

Committee: [Appropriations](#)

From: Michael Blackwell, Director, St. Mary's County Library

Position: Support

Dear Chair Barnes, Vice Chair Kaiser, and distinguished members of the Committee,

On behalf of the Trustees, 74 employees, and thousands of card holders (including school student cards) of St. Mary's County Library, I urge you to support funding for county libraries. 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% of operating funds from the state. Regionals receive approximately 22% of operating funds from the state. In St. Mary's we receive 17% of our budget from the state; we rely on that funding to provide essential services.

The current funding cycle is set to expire at the end of FY27, after which these systems will receive flat funding. SB378 extends the state share increases from FY2028-FY2032 at an annual rate of increase of 3% for regionals and 3.21% for county library systems. Extending the state share cycle ensures libraries can continue to meet increased operating costs and public service demands. Without this extension, libraries may be forced to make difficult decisions that reduce the number of programs, services, operating hours, etc. At a time when we are seeing attempted disinvestment in libraries at the federal level, it is a critical time for the state to maintain its support.

Library services have significantly evolved over the last decade, and funding is necessary for libraries to keep pace with increasing demand. Between 2014 and 2024 (the last year for which data is available), the number of public programs has risen by 32% (64,185 in 2014 to 84,576 in 2024). Program attendance has risen by 21%, from 1,788,330 to 2,171,049; enough to fill M & T stadium 30 times over, or Camden Yards 47 times over. In St. Mary's, hosted 1,749 programs in FY 25, with an attendance of 35,535. This funding is vital for us to continue to serve so many.

Maryland public libraries now offer nearly 4 million e-books, an increase of 1480% since 2014. The cost of e-books is not expected to level off anytime soon, and the cost to provide sufficient material to meet demand will outpace both inflation and state funding levels. In St. Mary's, our ebook circulation in FY25 continues to grow, up 12% over last year, even as E-book demand continues to rise, as does the cost of e-materials, far outpacing scheduled funding increases,

As living costs continue to rise, Maryland libraries continue to provide robust access to books, the internet and other technology, buildings, programs, and services for every member of the community. Maryland's libraries support babies and pre-school children and their families/caregivers in developing a love of reading and early

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literacy skills which set them up for school success. Maryland libraries hosted 29,742 programs for ages birth to five, with a total attendance of 886,277. Maryland libraries support pre-school and school age children with age and reading-level appropriate material in physical and digital formats. Across Maryland's libraries, children checked out nearly 18 million items in FY 2024. IN FY 2025, children (or their parents for them) checked out 432,358 items, helping to build life-long learning skills to ensure Maryland's future.

Maryland's public libraries are supplementing the eroding social safety net, expanding services to include Social Workers in the Library, free legal aid, criminal record expungement, tax assistance, food pantries and more. Marylanders can access more services more easily by using expanded outreach services, including more mobile libraries in neighborhoods providing local WiFi, STEM learning experiences, Makerspace learning, and easier access to collections. In St. Mary's our meeting and study spaces were used 7,692 times, providing an essential "third space" free to all.

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. IN the Southern Region, our employees and patrons benefit greatly, with the Regional Library providing our catalog, materials processing, transportation of materials between branches, and so much more.

In a time of economic challenges, more than ever Marylanders rely on public libraries, and the regional libraries that support the public libraries, for materials to help inform and inspire, for connectivity online and to their fellow residents, and for innovative programming that addresses a broad range of needs. Supporting a small increase in funding for the five years after FY2027 wilk help ensure that Marylanders will grow, engage in self-development, and thrive.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michael Blackwell".

Michael Blackwell, Director, St. Mary's County Library

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