



**BILL: HB1592**

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

**TESTIMONY**

**FROM:** Natalie Hagan,  
Executive Director, Kent County Public Library

**DATE:** March 16, 2026

**COMMITTEE:** Appropriations

**POSITION:** Support

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

Kent County Public Library (KCPL) supports funding for the **House Bill 1592 Education - Regional Resource Centers and County Libraries - Young Readers Matching Grant Program, Funding, and Services** .

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.

The current funding cycle is set to expire at the end of FY27, after which these systems will receive flat funding. 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.

More than 3.3 Marylanders hold public library cards. These Marylanders borrow more than 53 million items from public libraries every year.

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):

■ Public Programs:

- 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.
  - Maryland's libraries support babies and pre-school children and their families/caregivers in developing a love of reading and early 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.
- WiFi:
- In 2024, Marylanders accessed free public WiFi nearly 24 million times at public libraries, an increase of 657%, or more than 20 million more uses than in 2014.
- E-Books:
- 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.

As a rural library system in Maryland, Kent County is particularly in need of continued funding to support small and rural libraries through State Aid and the Regional Resource Centers is critical to supporting Marylanders. Our regional libraries service small and rural libraries where local governments cannot fully fund the cost of operating them. Regionals work cooperatively to provide books, materials transit services, technology, databases, training and other services to member libraries.

Without them, we cannot continue to do what we do.

**KCPL supports the passage of this budget item.**

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'Natalie Hagan'.

Natalie Hagan

Executive Director, Kent County Public Library (KCPL)