

Peter Hobby
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BILL: **HB 1592 Education-Regional Resource Centers and County Libraries – Funding/ Public Libraries – Young Readers Matching Grant Program, Funding and Services** **DATE:** **March 18, 2026**

SUBJECT: Regional Resource Centers and County Libraries – funding/Young Readers Matching Grant Program **COMMITTEE:** Appropriations

TESTIMONY FROM: Peter Hobby, Board of Trustees, Queen Anne’s County Library

POSITION: **Support**

Dear Chair Barnes, Vice Chair Kaiser, and members of the committee:

As a Board Member of the Queen Anne’s County Library, I support **HB 1592 Education-Regional Resource Centers and County Libraries – Funding/Public 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.

The current funding cycle is set to expire at the end of FY27, after which the Queen Anne’s County Library (QACL) and our regional resource center, the Eastern Shore Regional Library (ESRL), will receive flat funding. SB387 extends the state share increases from FY2028 - FY2032 with an annual increase of 3% for ESRL and 3.21% for QACL. Without this extension, QACL and ESRL will be forced to make complex decisions that reduce the number of programs, services, operating hours, and staff available to help our community. It is critical for the state to maintain its support for our libraries.

Library services have significantly evolved over the last decade, and funding is necessary for QACL to keep pace with increasing demand. Between FY22 and FY25, the number of public programs offered by QACL increased by 89%, from 407 programs offered to 889. Program attendance also increased from 11,140 in FY 22 to 15,507 in FY 25. Public Wi-Fi use, a valuable service our community needs and uses, increased 43% from FY 23 – FY25. Our community’s use of digital formats has steadily increased as well; 35% from FY 24 to FY25.

Over the past decade, the cost of providing library services, our operating expenditures, has outpaced inflation – increasing by 42% for county library systems and 37% for regionals, compared to the 31% overall inflation rate. The largest factor across both conditions was the increase in salary and wage costs. The demand for digital formats continues to rise, as does the cost of e-materials, outpacing the scheduled funding increases.

QACL supplements the eroding social safety network. Our spaces are open to everyone and allow our community members a place to be when they have nowhere to go. QACL regularly provides access to health services and social services at our library branches through our partnerships with the QAC Health Department to regularly do health screenings and with the QAC Department of Social Services to allow some of their staff to offer services at our branches. We also partner with Eastern Shore Pro Bono to offer legal help to our community members who need it but may not be able to afford it. These types of partnerships are made

possible through funding for our library system.

As living costs continue to rise, QACL continues to provide robust access to books, the internet, and other technology, buildings, programs, and services for every member of our community. Our library has thirty hotspots and ten Chromebooks available to check out for those in our community who don't have access to the internet or need a computer to work on from home. With access to a working computer and the internet, our community members can access job resources, write and send their resumes, apply for jobs, and attend educational opportunities they would not otherwise be able to. When adults can access essential 21st century tools, they are competitive in the job market and can start to break the cycles of poverty.

Continued funding to support small and rural libraries through State Aid and the Regional Resource Centers is critical to support our community. QACL can provide access to homework help and tutoring through Brainfuse, which we are able to offer to our community through competitive pricing negotiated by the Eastern Shore Regional Library (ESRL). Funding for ESRL allows our smaller Eastern Shore public libraries to access databases and other resources at a lower cost than if each of our systems contracted separately with each vendor. We can support individuals looking for jobs or learning new skills through our Gale Courses and Test and Career Prep. Without access to these databases for free, many in our community would not have access to better jobs or be able to learn new skills to get better jobs.

QACL provides early childhood learning and family engagement to our community. In FY 25, QACL was able to present 254 birth-to-five early childhood learning programs focusing on early literacy training, socialization, physical education, and learning about the world around us. These programs were attended by 3,562 children aged birth to 5 and 2,993 adults. In addition, the Library was able to provide 121 programs targeting children 6-10 years old that focused on reading engagement, science, art, learning the art of strategy, and technology, to better prepare our children for the world that awaits them in the future. These programs reached 1,231 students and 765 adults. We were also able to support children who are struggling to read by providing the Book Buddies program in our elementary school. The Book Buddies program trains volunteers to read a portion of a book to students during their lunch period once a week for four weeks. At the end of the program, each student chose a book to keep and take home with them to continue to read the story on their own. In FY25 this program reached 280 third grade students. This program fills the gap Queen Anne's County is experiencing with the reduction in Reading Resource Teachers in the public schools. These programs are possible because of the funding we receive from the State.

In my role on the Queen Anne's County Library Board of Trustees, I support the passage of SB 378 Education-Regional Resource Centers and County Libraries - Funding. I respectfully ask for your support of this bill, which will allow our county public libraries and our regional resource centers to continue to support Maryland public libraries and our 3.3 million library card holders. By providing per capita funding in this budget cycle and increases through 2032, our public libraries will continue to offer access to information, materials, services, and resources our communities need and want.

Thank you for your consideration,

Peter Hobby
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