

House Bill 1592 – Education – Regional Resource Centers and County Libraries – Funding
House Appropriations Committee
Wednesday March 18, 2026
Information Only Testimony

Dear Chairman Barnes and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide information on House Bill 1592. Maryland’s public libraries are among the most heavily used public services in the State, welcoming tens of millions of visits annually and providing essential educational, workforce, and community services to residents of every county.

Maryland public libraries rely on the state for annual operating funding to support library personnel, infrastructure, and services. County library systems, on average, receive 18% of operating funds from the state. Regionals receive approximately 22% of operating funds from the state.

The Maryland State Library Agency collects and analyzes library usage and financial data on an annual basis. The data shows that over the past decade, public library operating costs have risen by more than 40 percent, outpacing inflation. Library Directors report that personnel costs—the largest component of all library budgets—have increased significantly as libraries compete in a tight labor market for skilled staff who deliver literacy instruction, technology training, and community services. At the same time, the price of digital library materials, including e-books and databases, has increased dramatically, often at rates far exceeding inflation. Technology infrastructure, broadband connectivity, building maintenance, and public safety needs have also added new operational costs.

The annual incremental increases provided through the State’s per-capita funding program has helped narrow this operating funding gap. The new per-capita funding formula for county public library systems will result in a 17% increase for public library systems and a 16% increase for regionals over the next 5 years. These adjustments help restore purchasing power and allow libraries to maintain high-quality services for Maryland residents.

Importantly, this legislation also aligns funding with updated expectations for modern library service. The bill clarifies that public libraries must provide services that support early childhood literacy and school readiness, information and technology literacy, workforce and economic development, digital equity and internet access, community response during public emergencies, and programs that promote mental health and personal well-being.

These service areas reflect how libraries have evolved into comprehensive community learning hubs. Libraries now act as key partners in advancing literacy proficiency across the state, assisting adults with job searches and small business development, providing digital access for residents without reliable internet, and serving as trusted community spaces, especially during times of crisis.

The gradual funding increases proposed in this bill supports libraries to meet these modern service standards while maintaining the long-standing State–local partnership that supports Maryland’s minimum library program.

The Maryland State Library Agency appreciates the Committee’s attention to the sustainability of library services and offers this testimony for informational purposes.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Morgan Lehr Miller".

Morgan Lehr Miller, MLIS
Maryland State Librarian