

**Testimony in support of
MSDE – Public Library Grant Program
A Hearing before the House Appropriations Committee
Capital Budget Subcommittee
March 9, 2011**

Chairman Jones and Distinguished Delegates:

Representing the **Citizens for Maryland Libraries**, I want to thank you for your unanimous approval of the County Public Library Capital Grant Program and ask for your support of full \$5 million funding of the program in FY 2012.

Maryland citizens love and use their libraries. In 2009, citizens made **34 million visits** to public libraries in Maryland. Public libraries are very busy providing access to computers, e-services, and e-commerce. In 2009, people **used library computers 8.5 million times** in addition to accessing library WiFi service. Libraries are a major educational resource that support lifelong learning, workforce development, and help children get ready to succeed in school.

There are 188 public library branches in Maryland or one library for every 30,000 citizens. Most of these libraries were built at least 30 years ago. Many are well over 40 years old. These well-loved buildings are in need of renovation and repair. Most have inadequate space and infrastructure to meet the current demands for service:

- When many of these libraries were built, there were no computers in libraries. Today, computers are in constant demand. For many residents, access to a computer is available only at a library.
- Today, libraries play a very important role in preparing children from birth to five to succeed in school by engaging them in activities that instill the joy of learning. Early learning areas in the library are packed with young children and their parents and caregivers. These spaces are very different from library children's areas built 30 years ago.
- Attendance at programs for citizens of all ages, such as science-related programs for students, educational events, book discussions, author visits, summer reading programs and computer training have increased, putting more demand on space within the library.
- Homeschoolers and study groups come to the library to work collaboratively on projects.
- Growing multiculturalism in Maryland has increased the demand for books in multiple languages.

- Libraries have partnered with other agencies to make services readily available including health screenings and voter registration. In addition, libraries are the community place the public counts on to find public information, from health related brochures to community events calendars, to tax forms.
- There is increased demand from the community for meeting room space in libraries.

During the same 30-year period, thousands of new houses have been constructed and the population has grown in areas where a library building is not readily available.

Maryland public libraries are struggling to meet the demand for adequate facilities; yet local Adequate Public Facility Ordinances in Maryland do not include libraries; therefore prior to the Capital Grant Program, it was very difficult for public libraries to compete for limited local capital funding.

The Public Library Capital Grant Program, which requires local matching funds, is making a tremendous difference in helping libraries address renovation and construction needs not only by providing direct funding through grants, but also **by giving libraries a tool to leverage local funding to improve and construct public library buildings.** Since the inception of the Capital Grant Program in FY 2008, more than \$16 million has been provided through this program, which has generated 10 times that amount in local matching funds, resulting in significant library infrastructure improvements in community libraries throughout Maryland.

Based on the premise that \$5 million would be available to fund the Public Library Capital Grant Program, library systems have submitted project applications totaling \$8 million in FY 2012.

Libraries in Maryland are good stewards of the funding they receive. They have a strong history of partnerships and resource sharing, which has resulted in efficient use of funding.

Citizens for Maryland Libraries **thank you** for your support of this important funding, which will help public libraries better meet the economic, educational, reading and research needs of Maryland's children, families, small business owners and others who use our public libraries by the thousands on a daily basis.

Respectfully submitted by,
Martha Grahame
President
Citizens for Maryland Libraries