

Senator James E. DeGrange, Sr., Chairman  
Members, Capital Budget Subcommittee  
Miller Senate Office Building  
3 West Wing, 11 Bladen St.  
Annapolis, MD 21401-1991

**Re: County Library Capital Grants**

Honorable Chairman and Distinguished Committee Members:

It is our understanding that on Tuesday, March 9, the Capital Budget Subcommittee will be reviewing the County Library Capital Grants for fiscal year 2011 and considering whether or not to make the grants a voluntary, rather than mandated, appropriation.

The main branch of the Talbot County Free Library was built 32 years ago to serve a small, mostly rural population. Unchanged since then, that building has long since become inadequate to the needs of a burgeoning, high-tech 21<sup>st</sup> century community. For 12 years now, our county has been carefully setting aside money in a community-wide effort to come up with the right combination of private and public funds that would allow us to bring this 1978 building up to modern standards.

Toward this end, our County Council has committed \$6,532,000 in matching funds. These monies will permit us to expand the existing building from 18,000 to 28,000 square feet, creating, in the process, a children's room separate from the adult area, a new Maryland Room, and additional space for public computers (essential in a world where people must have access to computers if they are to compete).

To complete this project, our community sought and was awarded a capital grant—in the amount of \$765,000—to replace the existing building's outdated and severely overloaded HVAC system. And so it is that a vast public undertaking is threatened by the very real possibility that, should these grants become voluntary, we could lose a piece of funding critical to the outcome of this important community project.

I would point out that the County Capital Grants are funded with capital bonds and do *not* involve operating funds or current revenue. The branch you would be helping to renovate serves as Talbot County's central library. In the past year that library has seen more than 200,000 visits, including more than 49,600 uses of the internet on its public-access computers. The Talbot County Free Library has over 27,600 registered borrowers—78% of the total county population. Over 80% of all library business is conducted in the library's main branch, the building your funds would help renovate.

I strongly urge you to support going forward with the grant process as it is now written.

Sincerely,