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Ways and Means Committee

Education Subcommittee

House Chair
Baltimore City Delegation



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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

**Testimony in support of
HB436: Enoch Pratt Free Library – Operating Hours and Funding
House Appropriations Committee
February 10, 2021**

Chairwoman McIntosh, Vice Chair Chang, and Committee Members:

On behalf of the citizens of Baltimore and the Enoch Pratt Free Library, I respectfully introduce **HB436: Enoch Pratt Free Library – Operating Hours and Funding**.

This bill requires an annual appropriation of \$3 million to be used for branches of the Enoch Pratt Free Library to extend operating hours and services to enhance accessibility for the convenience of residents served by Enoch Pratt Branches, namely evenings and weekends. This bill also requires a funding commitment from the City of Baltimore:

City of Baltimore's Obligation:

- 25% match annually (\$750,000)
- Mayor and City Council must report annually on the impact of extended hours

This bill is an extension of similar legislation passed in 2016 which authorized the appropriation of \$3 million over the past five years through FY22. As an historical footnote, this legislation dates back to January of 2016 when the Pratt Library made the courageous decision to remain open to the public after normal hours in the wake of the Freddie Gray unrest.

That moment sparked a renewed recognition of the important role that the Pratt Library System plays as a vital resource for the community. Since that time, funding from this legislation has enabled Enoch Pratt Library branches to expand their hours and advance the library's commitment to equity, inclusion, through greater access to library resources, programs, and services.

This means greater access to services such as free internet, educational resources, workforce development assistance, social workers, and the Pratt's Lawyer in the Library program as well as traditional library circulation of books and other reference materials. We know too well that many citizens lack critical access to affordable internet. Statewide data show that factors such as race, income, and geography create additional barriers to access. I represent neighborhoods in Baltimore with some of the lowest household incomes, yet despite this fact, since the Pratt extended their hours four years ago, Enoch Pratt has seen a significant increase in utilization which you will hear more about during the Pratt's CEO Heidi Daniel's testimony.

This bill has the support of the Baltimore City Delegation.

I cannot stress enough the importance of this bill and what it means to the citizens of Baltimore especially now when institutions like The Enoch Pratt Free Library are stepping up to provide greater services during this time of COVID relief.

I respectfully urge your support and a favorable committee report on HB436.

Thank you.

Del. Stephanie Smith