



House Bill 243

*Baltimore City Young Readers Program - Expansion and Alterations
(Young Readers Program Expansion Act of 2023)*

MACo Position: **SUPPORT**

To: Ways and Means Committee

Date: February 8, 2023

From: Brianna January

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **SUPPORTS** HB 243. This bill would add greater flexibility to the existing successful Young Readers Program in partnership with the Dolly Parton Imagination Library and would appropriate additional State funding to support the program and, in turn, the learning and growth of young readers around the state.

Counties were pleased a 2022 bill become law, making the Young Readers Program accessible to all jurisdictions and providing seed funding for those wishing to do so. The program provides free, high-quality literature and resources to children under the age of 5 and their families, regardless of the families' income status. Prior, the program only operated in Baltimore City and Montgomery County, where it proved beneficial in many ways, including improving literacy levels, increasing parent-child interaction, and better preparing children before they enter school.

HB 243 would provide greater flexibility to these reading programs, altering the current requirement for books to be mailed to simply being "distributed," so that families can also access them at libraries, schools, community centers, and other places. Furthermore, the bill would dedicate additional annual state funding to the program – from \$200,000 to \$500,000. Doing so will not only help new counties establish programs but would also allow existing programs to serve more Maryland children.

Counties are excited to see where the program takes Maryland students and HB 243 would further support those efforts. In fact, several jurisdictions have already established their own version of the program under the 2022 law.

All counties share in the goals of encouraging reading in young children, deepening literacy, and preparing kids to be successful in school. Counties welcome the opportunity to expand resources to do so via The Young Readers Program. For these reasons, MACo **SUPPORTS** HB 243 and urges a **FAVORABLE** report.