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Maryland State Library Agency

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Response to the Analyst's Review

**House Education & Economic Development Subcommittee
February 8, 2021**

**Senate Education, Business & Administration Subcommittee
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State Librarian**

The Maryland State Library Agency (MSLA) welcomes this opportunity to share with the Committee some of its success stories and to address information in the analysis.

The Maryland State Library Agency (MSL) was established as an independent State agency effective July 1, 2017. MSLA administers State and Federal funds to support Maryland libraries in their mission to offer outstanding resources, programs, and excellent customer service. The agency provides leadership to promote planning and innovation in the development of library programs, encourage the ongoing development of staff expertise through education and training and promote resource sharing among all types of libraries. Responsibilities include oversight of: the Maryland State Library for the Blind and Print Disabled (LBPD), Maryland's Public Libraries, the State Library Resource Center, the three Regional Libraries, the Library Capital Grants Program, and the Deaf Culture Digital Library. To learn more about the Maryland State Library please visit our website at <https://www.marylandlibraries.org/>.

We are proud to announce that in fiscal year 2020, the Maryland State Library distributed nearly \$2.2 million in federal grant awards to support Maryland public libraries, an increase of over 300% since the agency was established in 2017. The name of the Maryland State Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped was changed to the Maryland State Library for the Blind and Print Disabled (LBPD) by unanimous approval of the Maryland General Assembly during the 2020 session (SB 326 and HB 604) and passed into law effective October 1, 2020. This bill also added the requirement that one member of the Maryland State Library Board shall be a blind patron of the LBPD. MSL was able to provide continuous mail and phone service to blind and low vision customers during the pandemic thanks to the commitment of the LBPD staff.

MSL opened the [Maryland Deaf Culture Digital Library](#) website, issued the *Maryland Day By Day: Family Literacy Activity Calendar*, including an [interactive online version](#) and sponsored the One Maryland One Book selection *What the Eyes Don't See* by Mona Hanna-Attisha. In addition, MSL hosted the fifth annual MD Tech Connect conference at UMD Shady Grove campus, featuring Maryland libraries' exciting technology projects. MSL partnered with Maryland Census and the Maryland Department of Planning to provide timely and accurate information to library systems about the 2020 Census. *Best Practices for Reopening Maryland Libraries* was developed to provide statewide guidance and recommendations on the phased reopening of Maryland public libraries during COVID-19. This document can be found at [COVID-19 Resources for Maryland Libraries](#), a web guide developed to provide libraries with a compendium of information and resources to assist decision-making about reopening. Finally, the *Laws of Maryland Relating to Public Libraries, 2019 Edition*, was issued and the MSL headquarters were relocated to 25 South Charles, Suite 1310, Baltimore, MD 21201.

As the analyst points out in his review, in addition to budgeted State and federal funding, libraries and communities benefited from \$546,279 in Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act funding distributed by MSL to public library systems for the purchase of PPE and supplies to encourage social distancing, WiFi hotspots and circulating devices, additional digital content, and staff training around pandemic response.

Maryland libraries met the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic by quickly pivoting to programs in new formats and enhancing, expanding and adding essential services to communities across the State. While branches were closed or were only able to provide limited in-building services, libraries extended free WiFi beyond their buildings, allowing residents to access vital internet connections from parking lots and community spaces. Library staff continued to engage customers by providing robust virtual programming, from story times to conversations on equity and justice. Providing programs virtually has allowed for cross promotion, expanded registration, and collaborative program planning. No longer geographically bound, people from anywhere in the state can

participate in engaging and educational programs, such as story times, STEM programs, workforce development including job searching skills, book discussions and author events. While not in FY 2020, on July 20, 2020, Maryland Public libraries hosted “An Evening with Ibram X. Kendi”, which drew a live audience of 226,000 people from around the world, and additional 122,920 people watched the recording during the month it was posted.

Libraries provided contactless services, including book pickup, remote printing and 3D printing services, (including the coordinated state-wide effort which resulted in the creation of thousands of pieces of 3D printed PPE for first responders early on in the crisis), as well as phone and virtual reference help. Maryland libraries remain resilient and responsive to their communities’ needs, and will continue to innovate and collaborate to provide crucial services to ensure that our communities are strong and well-positioned for a rapid recovery from the coronavirus pandemic.

According to the fiscal 2019 Maryland public library statistics, Maryland Public Libraries had over 3.3 million registered borrowers. 56% of Marylanders hold library cards and there were 25 million visits to the library with over 57 million items borrowed (both physical & electronic). Maryland libraries held more than 100,000 events, including over 57,000 programs for the youngest Marylanders, with over 1.7 million benefitting from early literacy and STEM activities, summer learning, Food in the Summer, and family programs for a total of 2.6 million program attendees. Maryland libraries provided more than 5,400 computers and free WiFi access at all 190 branches, and in the community via bookmobiles and mobile hotspots. Library staff answered 7.8 million questions. Additionally, there were 91,000 meeting room uses for small business needs, homeschooling groups, and community conversations.

In response to a need to bring together library staff from all types of libraries throughout the state to discuss and share best practices and strategies for promoting and supporting diversity and inclusive practices throughout the state, MSL established the [Maryland Task Force for Diversity and Inclusion in Libraries](#). The mission of the task force is to promote and support diversity and inclusion in all Maryland libraries by:

- Encouraging affirmation, respect, inclusion, and understanding of all library patrons and staff
- Providing education to increase awareness of the different dimensions of diversity
- Sharing resources concerning best practices for creating inclusive environments.

In addition, MSL introduced the statewide virtual study of the [Project Ready](#) curriculum: a multi-module, asynchronous study of a series of free, online professional development modules for school and public youth services librarians, library administrators, and others interested in improving their knowledge about race and racism, and racial equity.

Public libraries continue to be a cornerstone of our democracy, serving the needs and interests of the community. They are deeply appreciated, especially for their role and impact in the community. Libraries are seen as having a mandate to take on an expanded role in public life and most parents highly value libraries as a resource for their children. According to a recent [Maryland Public Library State-Wide Public Opinion Poll](#), 74% of respondents think libraries are doing a good or great job, 80% think libraries improve their communities and almost 2/3 think libraries provide an essential service.

MSLA concurs with the analyst’s recommendation and thanks the General Assembly for their support of the Maryland State Library Agency.