



Coalition of Maryland Libraries Candidate Questionnaire

Brooke Lierman – Candidate for Maryland Comptroller

1. Book challenges and calls to remove titles from libraries of every kind have seen a sharp rise, both locally and nationally. In what ways would you support the Freedom to Read for K-12 students and all users of Maryland’s libraries?

Libraries provide a critical service to Marylanders by increasing access to books, the internet, and by providing workforce development skills training - just to name a few! They foster a sense of community and give children and adults the tools they need to thrive as students and families. When individuals have access to a wide array of reading materials, they are able to learn about different perspectives and subjects and broaden their horizons.

I absolutely support the right of libraries to acquire and make available a full range of materials. The First Amendment, not unfounded calls to remove titles from libraries, is what must be protected and upheld.

As Comptroller, I will support efforts by the Maryland State Library Agency (MSLA), the Administration, and the Maryland General Assembly on policies that further the Freedom to Read for K-12 students and all users of Maryland’s libraries.

2. The pandemic showed us the extent of the digital divide in Maryland; even households with some access to the internet relied on hotspots from libraries to gain enough connectivity for education, work and recreation. Additionally, librarians are critical resources for teaching digital literacy. How will you integrate libraries into plans to extend broadband and increase digital literacy locally and in the state?

The pandemic exposed how critical affordable, reliable access to the internet is for all Marylanders. Without broadband, families are unable to access online school and telehealth appointments, apply for benefits online, work remotely, or access goods and services. By purchasing WiFi hotspots that patrons can check out, giving away Chromebooks, utilizing mobile units, and installing antennas on library rooftops families can use for free, Maryland libraries have drastically expanded internet access. While Maryland’s libraries received \$2.9 million in ARPA federal funds in fiscal 2022 for the purposes of increasing broadband and internet access, MSLA reported that the request from county libraries for these items and programs totaled \$5.2 million - meaning at least an additional \$2.6 million is needed to support these programs.



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As a state delegate, I was proud to work with the Enoch Pratt on local initiatives to boost access to high speed internet, and to pull together a broad coalition - including MSLA - to pass the Digital Connectivity Act of 2021 to create the Office of Statewide Broadband and more.

The work of Maryland's libraries and librarians to teach digital literacy and increase access to broadband for the communities is critical. As Comptroller, I will call for leveraging federal and state dollars so that Maryland's libraries can continue their work to assist in expanding Maryland's broadband infrastructure and increase digital literacy, using my vote on the BPW to expand affordable broadband. I will also be an advocate for libraries so that Maryland's librarians can continue to improve our citizens' digital literacy.

3. Libraries help Marylanders find employment, launch businesses, and learn new skills. How would you support the role of libraries in workforce and economic development?

I applaud Maryland's libraries for dedicating job-seeker coaches, developing financial literacy courses, and partnering with local government and businesses to connect patrons to jobs and resources. MSLA received \$360,000 in ARPA federal funds for workforce development training spaces and technology upgrades. As Comptroller, I will advocate for leveraging more federal and State funds for libraries to continue to expand their role in providing Marylanders workforce and economic development skills.

4. Public expenditure on K-12 education in Maryland represents a significant portion of the state budget; however, brain growth is most active from birth to age 5. This is an age group that libraries have supported for decades, providing "first literacy" experiences for millions of children. How will you prioritize libraries as part of public expenditures on those most important years of learning and growth for Maryland's youngest residents?

My record as Delegate illustrates my support for our public libraries. In 2017, I was proud to cosponsor House Bill 1094, which established the Maryland State Library Agency as an independent agency to, among other things, administer funding for Maryland's libraries.

In 2020, the Maryland General Assembly passed legislation increasing the mandated annual funding of the Public Library Capital Grant Program to \$7.5 million. This increased funding was slated to go into effect in fiscal year 2022; however, the Governor vetoed the bill. As Delegate, not only did I vote for the passage of the legislation in 2020 but I also voted to overturn the veto during the 2021 legislative session. As a result of the veto override, the Administration added \$2.5 million to the program's fiscal year 2022 budget through a supplemental budget.



Additionally, this past session, I voted for House Bill 685 which increases aid to local libraries by \$1.5 million in FY 2023 and by \$6.4 million in FY 2027.

As Comptroller, I will continue to prioritize our libraries so that they can be places for our children to grow and learn.

5. It takes a team of great educators to mentor a child to educational success. How would your administration support having a properly funded certified school librarian in every Maryland Public School?

Ensuring that Maryland is providing every child the opportunity to attend a world-class public school will be one of my top priorities. I have and will support programmatic changes to our education system that enhance the education of our children. I also have

partnered with Baltimore City Public Schools to build new libraries in many of our schools working with the Weinberg Foundation - including at FSK and Westport and Commodore John Rodgers. As part of that work, we required each school to have a full time certified librarian. As a public school mother of two, I understand the important impact a librarian and well-stocked library can have on young children.

6. Describe the role you see libraries playing in the effort to increase equity and inclusion for Marylanders who have been marginalized or adversely affected by existing biases.

Libraries have the ability to bring together communities; they are a conduit for exchanging ideas and increasing awareness. Instead of calls for removing titles, libraries should be encouraged to expand their collections. By increasing access to books on diverse topics we can foster a better understanding of existing biases and create a more inclusive environment for those who have been marginalized.

The efforts and leadership by our libraries to bridge the digital divide and enhance access to broadband are also critical components of increasing equity and inclusion for Marylanders. Individuals who cannot access reliable internet are often the same Marylanders who have been marginalized or adversely affected by existing biases. By increasing internet access - and equipping individuals with the tools and knowledge on how to use technology - libraries can play a major part in building a more equitable Maryland.

Libraries are trusted partners and must continue their leadership role. I look forward to working with libraries in the future to provide more tax services, help from the Comptroller's office, and more.



7. Capital funding for new library buildings and renovations is extremely limited, while the role of a library as the hub of its community continues to grow. What steps would you take to ensure adequate funding for library capital projects throughout the state?

As stated above in the answer to question #4, I have voted to mandate and increase the capital funding for our libraries. As Comptroller, I will continue to advocate for adequate funding for library capital projects across the state and will work with county and state leadership to ensure our libraries receive the support they need in order to continue meeting the needs of our communities.

8. During community crisis, such as the recent pandemic, library staff members are on the front lines distributing masks, test kits, and vaccine information, in addition to re-creating library services to include new services such as online programs and contact-free materials delivery. They did all this and more while maintaining COVID safety protocols. How would your administration support library staff members in this role as front line crisis responders and community educators?

I commend Maryland's dedicated librarians and library staff members for their service throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. As noted in the question, Maryland library staff quickly pivoted and began distributing masks, test kits, and vaccination information. Libraries practiced safe physical distancing, using plexiglass guards and hand sanitizer, and limited group activities. I am impressed with how library staff members were able to implement new online programs and establish processes that enabled contactless deliveries in such a challenging environment.

As Comptroller, I will continue to support the hard work, dedication, and continued efforts of Maryland librarians and library staff members as they are integral in ensuring the success of every community across the State. My door will always be open to ensure robust dialogue as librarians assess the needs of the communities that they serve. Finally, I will always be a reliable partner for the Coalition of Maryland Libraries and be an advocate for its members.