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Sevierville, TN 37862

imaginationlibrary.com

Dear House Appropriations - Elementary and Secondary Subcommittee Committee,

Thank you for sharing in my dream – “Create a love for books and reading - give every child the start they need in education and life.”

Dolly Parton’s Imagination Library began with Dolly’s desire that every child, regardless of income, would have access to books. Growing up in poverty with a father who was functionally illiterate, Dolly witnessed as a small child how her father’s inability to read and write held him back from achieving his dreams. With her father as inspiration, the Imagination Library comes from a very personal place for Dolly.

Furthermore, the program’s universal aspect is also rooted in Dolly’s personal experience, recalling what it felt like to be treated like a poor family and receiving handouts. She didn’t want any child to feel like they were receiving the books because they were poor and instead that this “**gift**” should be for all children, as equals.

**Thank you** for agreeing it is imperative your youngest learners have access to high-quality, age-appropriate books. We agree nothing is more basic, more essential, more foundational to a child’s success in life than the ability to read!

Since launching programs locally in 2003, we have seen increasing demand and participating numbers with over 56,000 registered children but we are currently serving only 11% of your 499,906 0-5 children and there are so many more children without access to books.

Experience with other statewide programs has proven that a successful participation goal is ~65% of the total eligible 0-5 children. Statewide expansion happens over multiple years, with average growth of 15 – 25% new children registered per year.

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There are many benefits of a State Imagination Library Program versus a collection of local programs scattered across the state:

- County level program partners ensure statewide coverage for all zip codes
- Equitable Access for all families to early learning resources
  - Children start kindergarten with shared experience and helps level the playing field
  - Creates a shared bond with children across neighborhoods, race, economic differences, helps break division
- Partner with state agencies to find most vulnerable children
  - Foster Care
  - Babies born into correctional facilities
  - WIC Families
- Partnership with state birthing hospitals
- Partnership with State Department of Education to flag DPIL participants and track both participant and program effectiveness
- Partnership with State and Local Library System – increases library use for all family members
- Tie to Adult Literacy and Dual Language Programs – multi generational focus on literacy
- Fun state level focus on family time and reading - ex: Drive with Dolly License Plate campaign increases focuses on reading, drives program enrollment, and generates funds for local programs



- Opportunity to layer on other family resource programs: ex: Book Buses into communities, partnered with Food and Medical

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- Partnership with Parks and Recreation / DNR to create storybook trails using Imagination Library books
- State Program Partner works across state to fundraise and help local communities so there are never communities with children on waiting lists and if there is state budget deficit in a coming year, have mitigation funds ensuring the program continues.

The Imagination Library is more than just a feel-good program: the body of evidence on early brain development shows the importance of reading to young children. Dolly Parton's Imagination Library certainly makes people happy, but more importantly, it changes lives :)

Over the last 29 years, The Dollywood Foundation and its affiliate partners have undertaken a wide range of evaluations, studies, and data collection on numerous aspects of the Imagination Library.

### **Selected Measurable Impact Results:**

- Reading 3 times a week jumped from 60 to 85%
- Daily Reading doubled from 29 to 59%
- 29% Increase in children ready for Kindergarten
- Significantly stronger reading skills and higher scores on reading achievement tests over their non-participating peers, consistently from Kindergarten through 3rd Grade
- Recent study demonstrates over the last 5 years Imagination Library cohort consistently outperforming non-participating peers on Assessments from Kindergarten through 9th grade.
- Recent study key finding DPIL students overall saw a greater likelihood of positive academic results in all measures examined.
  - DPIL students scored higher on all sections of the Qualls than non-DPIL students, Higher by 4.6%, General Knowledge, 4.5% Oral Communication, 6.1% Written Communication, 6.3% Math Concepts, 2.1% Work Habits, and 2.0% Attentive Behavior
- DPIL students were retained in kindergarten at a rate of 23.8% lower than non-DPIL students
- DPIL students had a higher rate of proficiency in all three areas of the ACT Aspire than non-DPIL students.
  - The rate of proficiency for DPIL students on the Reading and Language Arts assessment was 18.26% higher than non-DPIL students
  - The rate of proficiency for DPIL students on the mathematics assessment was 15.13% higher than non-DPIL students

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- The rate of proficiency for DPIL students on the Science assessment was 24.16% higher than non-DPIL students
- DPIL students were retained in 3rd grade at a rate of 27.9% below non-DPIL students.
- DPIL students were retained between kindergarten and third grade at a rate 17% lower than non-DPIL students
- 2022 Ohio Case Western Reserve University Study found a positive correlation between enrollment in DPIL and a child's Kindergarten Readiness Assessment (KRA) score
  - Furthermore, in a 2021 survey sent to families participating in DPIL, the majority of families report:
    - Reading to their child/children more often since receiving DPIL books
    - Their child is asking to be read to more often since receiving DPIL books
    - Feeling DPIL is better preparing their child for kindergarten
    - Their child using new words they learned in DPIL books more often
    - Appreciating the uniqueness, variety, and diversity of characters in DPIL books
    - Survey showed an even greater positive impact in zip codes with higher rates of poverty.
- Establishing reading routines brings about increased stability, emotional well-being, and improved family atmosphere. Books provide attachment and connection in families creating conditions that allow parents to parent.
- A healing effect in the community manifesting in emerging neighborhood literacy initiatives, increased library usage, and connection to Adult / Dual language reading programs.
- Becomes a catalyst for other children / family services in the community.

More data and research can be found @ Imagination Library Website, standalone section titled Research.

<https://imaginationlibrary.com/news-resources/research/>

It is even more important now to get books in the homes of children. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, we know millions of children had limited or no access to books with schools, preKs, libraries, community centers, and bookstores closed. While there was immense effort from all sectors to support school age children to continue their education, the needs of our youngest children may have been overlooked.

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Decades of research have established a link between a child's exposure to trauma and its effect on their neurological and behavioral development. Children under five lived through the coronavirus crisis during a critical time in their development. From birth to age 5, a child's brain develops more than at any other time in life; and early brain development has a lasting impact on a child's ability to learn, and to succeed in school and in life. The quality of a child's experiences in the first few years of life – positive or negative – helps shape how their brain develops. The impact can be significant and long-lasting but can be reduced or mitigated by parents and caregivers providing a safe, stable, and nurturing environment engaged in language-rich interactions like talking, reading, and singing. The power of sharing books and literacy opportunities at home is perhaps more important now than ever before. Thank you for caring so much!

The Dollywood Foundation is thrilled to partner with the State of Virginia to get more books into the hands of more Virginia children and families!

Dolly Parton's Imagination Library inspires family reading, is community-based to drive ownership, and is designed to improve the lives of children at scale. Big impact with low cost, low effort, and low risk.

For over 29 years, The Dollywood Foundation annually contributes millions of dollars to make the Imagination Library available, covering expenses such as administrative, book selection, operational, database management, marketing, training, technical assistance and more. Our shared cost model keeps local program costs down to only reduced book, mailing and local administrative expenses.

Thank you for considering substitute House Bill 1075. The Dollywood Foundation is ready to support and assist ensuring all Virginia children from birth to 5 years old have access to high-quality, age-appropriate books monthly at no cost to families.

Kindly,

Nora Briggs

Executive Director, The Dollywood Foundation

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