

FY 2023 Report on the Impact of Enoch Pratt Free Library (EPFL) Expanded Hours

Respectfully Submitted to:
Department of Budget and Management
Senate Budget and Taxation Committee
House Appropriations Committee

Respectfully Submitted on behalf
of the Mayor and City Council of Baltimore City



ENOCH PRATT
free LIBRARY

March 6, 2024

The Honorable Guy Guzzone
Chairman, Senate Budget and Taxation Committee
3 West Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401-1991

The Honorable Ben Barnes
Chairman, House Appropriations Committee
121 House Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401-1991

**Re: 2023 Report on the Impact of Enoch Pratt Free Library (EPFL) Expanded Hours
Required by State Government Article § 23-402(a) (3-5)**

Dear Chairman Guzzone and Chairman Barnes:

The Maryland General Assembly passed SB 477/HB 436 in 2021 requiring the Governor to include in the State operating budget \$3,000,000 in general funds for fiscal year 2023 and each fiscal year thereafter to support the additional operating expenses for the increased hours of operation of all branches of the Enoch Pratt Free Library (EPFL).

The Enoch Pratt Free Library is pleased to submit the attached 2023 Report on the Impact of Enoch Pratt Free Library (EPFL) Expanded Hours required by State Government Article § 23-402(a) (3-5) on behalf of the Mayor and City Council of Baltimore City, in accordance with § 2-1257 of the State Government Article to the Department of Budget and Management and, in accordance with § 2-1246 of the State Government Article, the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee and the House Appropriations Committee. This report includes an evaluation of the impact of the increased hours of operation of the branches of the Enoch Pratt Free Library, including new technologies and changing neighborhood demographics and characteristics.

The report includes:

1. A list of the branches of the Enoch Pratt Free Library with increased operating hours for the previous fiscal year that are above the operating hours in effect as of January 1, 2016; and
2. An evaluation of the impact of the increased hours of operation of the branches of the Enoch Pratt Free Library. A copy of this report has also been made available to the Department of Budget and Management.

Prior to this time, EPFL had experienced a significant and consistent erosion of public support dollars for two decades, and many library branches had insufficient staffing and hours.

Demand for library services continued to remain high, especially in the areas of after school programming, career and job support, early literacy programs, formal school support, and STEM programming (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math). Communities needed libraries not only to check out materials and do research but, increasingly, to fill out job applications, find social services and resources, practice computer skills, and learn how to help children be better students and readers through programs and practice.

During the first six months the library established the infrastructure by hiring staff and establishing policies needed to expand hours. Subsequently, the library implemented the hours, tracking actual hours of service as well as the impact of expanded hours on usage and anticipated increased door counts, attendance at programs, borrowing of materials, computer use, and other services. In order to increase visibility of the expanded hours, they developed a marketing plan which includes use of media, purchase of billboards/bus signs, and other means to expand the public's knowledge of this significant increase in access.

Beginning in June 2018, and at the end of each subsequent fiscal year, the Enoch Pratt Free Library, on behalf of the Mayor and City Council of Baltimore City, has provided a status report on the implementation of this program to the Department of Budget and Management, the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee, and the House Appropriations Committee. Each annual report includes information about the progress and benefits of the funding, including usage information on the impact of the 30% increase in hours of service.

To date, the implementation of HB 1401 has had a significant impact in Baltimore City as measured by increased access, increased usage, and customer satisfaction. Additionally, the creation of over 100 full and part-time positions had a local and statewide impact on the economy as well. From FY 2016 to FY 2023, hours of service increased more than 21%. Collection use has increased 27%, *reaching its highest level in 12 years*. Online access and activity have increased as well: WiFi usage increased by 33%, website external sessions increased 7%, and social media followers have increased by 151%. Library visits are at about two-thirds of pre-pandemic levels, and continue to rise.

As required, in fiscal 2023, Baltimore City has provided an annual 25% match (\$750,000) for each dollar of State funds granted to support increased Library expenses.

It seems quite clear that passage of this legislation in 2021 has had the desired impact envisioned by then Speaker Michael Busch. The expanded hours implemented by the Enoch Pratt Free Library continue to increase the community's access to services and information, particularly in poor and underserved communities. That increased access has resulted in increased usage and the community is very appreciative of the City and State investment.

Please feel free to contact me for more information and, as always, thank you for your continued support of the Enoch Pratt Free Library!

Sincerely,



Darcell Graham, Interim CEO
Enoch Pratt Free Library

Background

Passed in the 2016 session, HB 1401 (Enoch Pratt Free Library--Hours of Operation-Funding) was legislation inspired by then Speaker of the House Michael Busch who wanted to provide meaningful assistance to Baltimore City in the wake of unrest following the death of Freddie Gray in the spring of 2015. Unlike most jurisdictions around the State, the Enoch Pratt Free Library (EPFL) had limited hours of public service in its 22 service locations. Most libraries were operating five days a week and needed to close on Mondays or Fridays in order to open on Saturday, an important day in most communities for educational and leisure activities. The limited service hours restricted the public's access to services and information, and restricted their ability to apply for jobs, attend programs of interest, and gather as a community. The legislation provided for \$3.0 million in yearly State Funding matched by \$750,000 from Baltimore City covering the period FY 2018 – FY 2022.

The legislation required that mandated funding be prioritized to expand library hours in branches located in poor and underserved communities. Pratt Library held a series of public meetings for community input regarding service needs and hours of operation, and used that and other information to submit the required plan for consistent six-day a week service across the city. EPFL submitted its expansion plan to the State Department of Budget Management and to the Chairs of the House and Senate budget committees by June 1, 2017, and certified Baltimore City's funding match. Additional positions were created to provide the staffing needed to implement the plan. EPFL implemented expanded hours at the Central Library in July 2017, and further expanded hours in November 2017 at other locations.

I never thought a library would change my life. Thank you Pratt, the social workers, and peer recovery navigators! Thanks to all of you and your resources my journey to recovery starts this week. Peace, love, and blessings.

Pratt Library Customer

With the initial FY 2018 – FY 2022, 5-year period completed, the purpose of this report is to provide information required by the current guiding legislation SB 477 (2021) on the impact of expanded hours in FY 2023 – and, subsequently, each fiscal year thereafter.

Impact

Implementation of expanded hours had a significant impact in Baltimore City as measured by increased access, increased usage, and customer satisfaction. Additionally, the creation of over 100 full and part-time positions had a local and statewide impact on the economy as well. The original legislation stipulated that the hours of service in effect as of January 1, 2016 would be the baseline against which the impact should be measured. Attached are appendices which provide evidence regarding the impact of the expanded hours.

From FY 2016 to FY 2023, hours of service increased more than 21%. Collection use has increased 27%, reaching its highest level in 12 years. Online access and activity increased as well: WiFi usage increased by 33%, website external sessions increased 7%, and social media followers have increased by 151%.

In FY 2020 – FY 2021, the coronavirus required closure of libraries, schools, and many businesses across the state. Pratt Library buildings closed to the public March 14, 2020. They reopened

I called colleges and asked what I need to get into a trade school. I was told I would need a diploma before I can attend their college or trade school. From this program I'm happy I got the opportunity.

Pratt Library Career Online High School Participant

Even during the pandemic, they did so many wonderful adjustments to continue the excellent service for our community.

Edmondson Avenue Branch Customer

Staff and librarians have been super helpful during and after the pandemic by offering masks and COVID test kits. Thank you all!

Pratt Library Customer

March 8, 2021 for limited hours and at 25% capacity. March 14, 2022, all locations returned to normal hours at 100% capacity (the expanded hours established in 2017 and which last represented full service in FY 2019 when the Central Library celebrated its reopening after its 3-year renovation). FY 2023 visits and reference transactions represent about 55%-60% of pre-COVID levels but continue to increase. Programs and program attendance are at nearly pre-COVID levels.

Ms. Alexis was a joy assisting me at the library. I needed to print a resume and I was also nervous for the interview. She helped calm me and gave me encouragement. I got the job with the help of Ms. Alexis!

Pratt Library Customer

EPFL has expanded wireless signals in communities; established and greatly expanded the circulation of hot spots and devices to help patrons stay connected;

When I started my new job in an office which prided itself on being paperless, it was clear that my computer skills needed work. My wife suggested the classes at the Pratt Library, so I signed up for the Workplace Readiness Series at the Orleans Street Branch. It was excellent, and I specifically want to note the skill and patience of the instructor. A substantial amount of material was presented which I am already incorporating into my work. I wanted to acknowledge how helpful the course has been. Thank you!"

Pratt Library Customer

established virtual and hybrid programming; expanded social impact programming such as Social Worker in the Library, Lawyer in the Library, Wellness in the Library, and Peer Navigators; and continues to work with customers to help them navigate the new digital world while also providing traditional library services. Pratt renovated the Hampden Branch (2021), and undertook the redesign and makeover of the Pennsylvania Avenue Branch (2023).

Customers have commented positively about the increased hours of service and some of those comments are included in the body of this document. Many more positive responses have been received via social media as well.

Recommendation regarding continuation of funding

It seems quite clear that passage of this legislation in 2016 has had the impact envisioned by then Speaker Michael Busch. The expanded hours implemented by the Enoch Pratt Free Library increased the community's access to services and information, particularly in poor and underserved communities. That increased access resulted in increased usage and the community expressed its great satisfaction with the City and State investment.

THANK YOU for being such an amazing resource to me and my nieces this summer. I walked out of the library basically clicking my heels from all the awesome things I was able to hook them up with, including a Chromebook and a WiFi hotspot so that they could keep up with their writing skills. I also signed them up for the Summer Reading program at the encouragement of the children's librarian. They loved their T-shirts and free book, and got super into reading in an effort to win those Orioles tickets! You're truly an amazing resource to all of us Baltimoreans.

*"How's Pratt Doing?"
customer compliment*

There are so many good things in Baltimore, but the best one is Pratt Library where every single employee is friendly, helpful, and professional. In Portuguese we Brazilians have a superlative of "thank you." Let me use it here to say "muito obrigado".

*"How's Pratt Doing?"
customer compliment*