



Allegany County Library System
31 Washington Street, Cumberland, MD 21502
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OUR LIBRARY
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LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Contact:

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January 24, 2025

Thank you to everyone who joined us for the Library Board meeting on January 14, 2025. We've received many comments, questions and concerns about the Fiscal Year 2026 Advisory Committee recommendations. We would like to take this opportunity to follow up and provide additional information for the community.

The library system, among other agencies in Allegany County, received a 10% reduction in local funding in FY2025. To allow us the time needed to research and prepare for this new reality, the library system exhausted its reserve funds to maintain the existing hours and staff in the current year. In July 2024, the Library Board of Trustees convened the FY2026 Library Advisory Committee with the purpose of gathering ideas and suggestions from all areas of the county to ensure we can continue to provide sustainable and cost-effective library services in Allegany County. Given the previous 10% reduction in funding and increasing costs in overhead, the library system is facing a significant funding shortage in FY2026 to operate at its current levels.

At the January 2025 Board meeting, the Library Advisory Committee presented their recommendations to the Library Board members for consideration; however, no actions or votes were taken at that meeting. We thank each member of the Library Advisory Committee for their hard work in developing recommendations for the Board to consider.

The Library Advisory Committee's recommendations included closing two or three library branches and potentially eliminating positions to balance our budget after the reduction in funding.

With everything said, the library system will submit a budget request to the County Commissioners during the county's normal budget cycle, that includes funding to maintain current hours at all library locations in Allegany County.

While the General Assembly and Allegany County Commissioners deliberate on their budgets, library staff will also prepare a "backup" budget. The backup budget will be prepared with the assumption that the County will be unable to provide additional funding.

If the county is unable to provide sufficient funding to maintain current hours at all 6 library locations, the Library Board will be forced to make very difficult decisions including acting on one or more of the Library Advisory Committee recommendations.





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In the coming months, we will undoubtedly hear more discussions and see more social media posts regarding the fate of all six libraries serving Allegany County. Nonetheless, no final decision on closing any library branches will take place until the June 10, 2025 Library Board meeting. By then, both State and County funding allocations will be known.

Public libraries, like many other local agencies, are not businesses. Libraries use our tax dollars to provide essential public services to enhance our communities and create opportunities for everyone. If we subscribe to the logic that libraries should run like a business, then the choice is clear that the 2 to 3 lowest performing library branches must be closed.

The Allegany County Library System works diligently to make the best use of every dollar it is allocated. However, it is the Allegany County Commissioners and the state elected officials who determine the number of dollars we receive. To keep all six library branches open at their current levels, elected officials must hear from you that sufficient library funding should be their priority.

Regardless of what the final decision is, we will continue to do our best to serve all Allegany County residents with resources like free internet access, educational programs, job assistance, and children's activities.

For those that wish to jump in and help, it is essential to remember that "Foundations" and "Friends group" fundraisers work best when they are used to enhance library services and typically cannot be relied upon for day-to-day expenses. The financial challenges we face are not a one-time deficit. Funds secured to keep libraries open must be secured year after year, as costs will only increase with time. Sustainable solutions are vital for the long-term health of our community and the library system.

While we may be the first county in Maryland forced to close a library due to a lack of funding in the last 30 years, the library system will continue to serve the ENTIRE county, perhaps in new and different ways. The LaVale Library was designed and built using capital funds (capital funds can only be used for construction, not operations) to ensure that Allegany County would always have access to essential library services in the county, despite declining population and reduced local funding.

As we navigate the next several months, you are invited to share your thoughts with the Library Board and other elected officials. The next Library Board meeting will take place at the Westernport Library on February 11, 2025. You can also provide your thoughts and solutions through email at boardmeeting@alleganycountylibrary.info.

We are proud to report that the Allegany County Library System continues to provide access to educational and entertaining material to everyone in our community at no cost.

We wish to be clear that we share your frustration and anxiety. Although the libraries are busier and more essential than ever, the possibility of not receiving the funding needed to maintain current





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operations is a real possibility. All of these decisions and possible changes weigh heavily on each and every one of us.

Sincerely,
John Taube
Executive Director, Allegany County Library System

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