



Allegany County Library System  
31 Washington Street, Cumberland, MD 21502  
(P) 301-777-1200 (F) 301-777-7299

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## LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Contact:

John Taube  
Executive Director  
301-777-1200 Ext 1005  
[jtaube@alleganycountylibrary.info](mailto:jtaube@alleganycountylibrary.info)

February 27, 2025

Thank you to all who attended our February 18, 2025 Library Board meeting in Westernport.

We were pleased that representatives of Allegany County Government attended the meeting to hear directly from their constituents. We also welcome their offer to provide their support, priorities, and guidance as we work to continue to provide library services across the county.

We shared the progress of the library system's annual budget submission to the county. As it stands, we will be requesting an additional \$159,000 from the County Commissioners—slightly less than previous estimates due to an unexpected \$19,000 increase in state funding. This budget request maintains all libraries and staff at their current levels and operating hours.

On Friday, February 21, 2025, ACLS shared a report detailing the library system's expenditures at each branch in FY2024. However, it's important to understand that this report is separate from the proposed annual budget.

The library's annual budget is prepared using broad budget categories—such as wages, collections, utilities, and snow removal—applied across all six locations, rather than by summing up individual branch expenditures. Because of this difference in structure, the FY2024 expenditures report does not directly correlate to the proposed FY2026 budget.

We shared the FY2024 expenditures report to provide the best estimate of the costs to operate each branch and this data was used to provide the original estimate provided to the "Save the Westernport Library" group.

We know there are concerns about how the library's budget is structured. Rather than having a separate budget for each branch, we operate as a library system with a unified, system-level budget. This system level approach allows us to squeeze every dollar we get to cost-effectively operate all the branches. If we were to divide the budget by individual branches based on population and local tax contributions, many of our smaller libraries would not have had the resources to continue to operate as they have for many years.





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We also heard other questions and concerns and wanted to share the answers with everyone.

We pointed out that the Library Advisory Committee's estimate of savings by closing Westernport Library did not include staffing costs. The estimate provided to the "Save the Westernport Library" group did include staffing costs.

If you refer to the FY2024 Expenditures Report published on February 21, 2025, you will see the amount of library system funding that was used to operate each library. In FY2024, we used \$135,338 to operate the Westernport Library; \$150,705 to operate the George's Creek Library; \$178,983 to operate the Washington Street Library; \$213,605 to operate the Frostburg Library, \$220,170 to operate the South Cumberland Library; and \$312,748 to operate the LaVale Library.

A question that came up repeatedly during the meeting was "how much would we need to raise to keep Westernport open?" or "how much would we need to raise to keep George's Creek open?" Because the library's budget is drafted and implemented using budget categories (wages, utilities, snow removal, ect) rather than by adding up the expected costs at each library, we do not predict what the cost to operate an individual library in an upcoming fiscal year. Using budget categories allows us to use the funding for the library that needs it the most. For example, looking at the Facilities Repair budget line, in FY2024, George's Creek Library had major HVAC repairs, while in FY2025, Frostburg Library incurred the majority of the HVAC repair expenses.

Another concern we heard was to account for the difference in the number of operating hours at each branch. The Library Advisory Committee used both per hour figures and total usage figures. For example, they looked at the number of items checked out per hour open and the number of visitors per hour open for each branch. The per hour figures showed that George's Creek and Westernport libraries had one-third the number of visits and checkouts compared to other branches. Additionally, while George's Creek, Westernport, and Washington Street libraries account for 26% of ACLS service hours, they serve only 13% of the county's residents. The current hours were implemented to accommodate the busiest times based on historical usage and visitor patterns.

The Library Advisory Committee recommended George's Creek, Westernport, and Washington Street libraries for potential closure. Unfortunately, to adequately account for the anticipated budget shortfall, we are also drafting plans to reduce hours at all six (6) libraries.

One common misconception that we would like to address, is that we are asking the Westernport community to raise the budget shortfall of the entire library system. We thank the communities for their fundraising efforts and wanted to assure them that their efforts to raise funds are independent of the Library System's FY2026 annual budget request to the County Commissioners. The Library System's annual funding request to the County Commissioners was drafted to maintain current services and hours at all six (6) library branches.





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It is important to note that the County's 10% budget cut in FY2025 did not directly cause the current financial challenges. The library system's funding challenges are historic, systemic, and ongoing. Allegany County Libraries have historically been near the bottom of the library funding per person among Maryland Libraries. Since FY2018, ACLS operating income has increased by only 4%, while costs of doing business have risen by 25%. Years of losing population and minimal annual increases have failed to keep pace with the rising costs of materials, supplies, and wages.

Quite simply, the library budget has reached a breaking point and we are now faced with unavoidable financial constraints. In FY2026, we anticipate a 14% increase in health insurance costs, reduced fine income, and higher operating costs all around. Additionally, we have budgeted a 3% cost-of-living wage increase for staff. Over the years, our ability to offer competitive wages has diminished. Without adjustments for inflation, we risk losing valued employees to better-paying opportunities elsewhere—jeopardizing service quality and leading to frequent library closures due to staffing gaps. To ensure that library services remain available across the county, we must carefully evaluate how to allocate limited resources effectively.

We share the concerns of our friends and community members. To reiterate the budget concerns outlined in the County Commissioner's February 20, 2025 letter to Governor Moore, "the \$5.1 million loss of revenue for our county jeopardizes essential services that residents rely on." And like the Commissioners, in FY25 the Library system balanced the budget responsibly, and to again quote the commissioners letter to Governor Moore, "However, it left us with little financial flexibility."

Thank you again.

Sincerely,  
John Taube  
Executive Director, Allegany County Library System

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