



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Jeremy Cooney

Senator Cooney, Assemblymember Reyes, Announce Push for \$2.5 Million In This Year's Budget To Expand Dolly Parton's Imagination Library Program Statewide

JEREMY COONEY March 27, 2024



The Imagination Library Delivers Free Books To Children Up to Five Years Old, Right To Their Home

(ALBANY, NY) - **Senator Jeremy Cooney (D-Rochester)** and **Assemblymember Karines Reyes (D-Bronx)** today announced their push for \$2.5 million in this year's state budget to expand Dolly Parton's Imagination Library program statewide.

After legislation was introduced this year to establish the program at the state level ([S8514A/A9652](#)), \$2.5 million was included for its creation in the Senate one-house budget resolution. The legislators explained that the next step is to secure the funding in this year's final state budget. Senator Cooney and Assemblymember Reyes were joined by Senator Iwen Chu, Chair of the Senate Libraries Committee, Assemblymember Angelo Santabarbara, Chair of the Assembly Committee on Libraries and Education Technology, Senator John Mannion, Jenn O'Connor with The Education Trust - NY, as well as representatives from the United Way of New York City, United Way of the Greater Capital Region, the Early Care & Learning Council, the New York Association for the Education of Young Children and the Alliance of New York State YMCAs.

The Imagination Library has proven to be successful across the nation with programs in all 50 states, as well as in individual chapters across New York State, like Rochester and the Bronx. Senator Cooney and Assemblymember Reyes' bills streamline the state program in New York by centralizing resources to foster, develop and sustain Imagination Library programs across the state. This will make it easier for local Imagination Library partners to promote and expand their programs, while making it more accessible for all children (birth to age 5) in New York.

"Bringing Dolly Parton's Imagination Library to children across New York is about promoting literacy and a love for reading at an early age," said **Senator Jeremy Cooney**. "As the son of an English teacher, this is deeply personal for me, as I've never forgotten the importance of reading at home. The Imagination Library is a transformational program and with a small investment, we can make a substantial difference in so many children's lives."

"As a young mother, I was fortunate to have books provided to my children from the Dolly Parton Imagination Library," said **Assembly Member Karines Reyes, R.N., Chair of the NYS Assembly & Senate's Puerto Rican / Hispanic Task Force**. "This organization expands

opportunities to children and encourages strong family bonds around reading at early ages, which leads to increased literacy and higher educational attainment of children over time. I am thankful for the work that the Dolly Parton Imagination Library has done for my family and I am hopeful that other families throughout our state will be able to benefit from a program like this. That is why I am proud to stand with my colleague, Senator Cooney, and advocates to push for the creation of this government program with modest funding to make this critical investment in our families.”

"Simply getting books into the home changes the trajectory of children, families and communities. Dolly Parton's Imagination Library is an accomplished, simple and effective way to make communities better places to live by supporting and nurturing a love of books, shared family time and early learning." **Nora Briggs, Executive Director, The Dollywood Foundation**

"The seeds of love and joy for reading are planted in the early childhood. As a mom, I know the exposure of reading in the first five years can be life-changing for a student. This early exposure not only cultivates a passion for reading but also significantly contributes to a child's overall development," said **Senator Iwen Chu, Chair of the Senate Libraries Committee.**

"However, too many children are in homes without books or access to books. I'm proud to fight for Dolly Parton's Imagination Library that can deliver books directly to children across New York State, fostering an enduring love for reading."

Dr. Matt Present, Pediatrician and Chapter Founder, Dolly Parton's Imagination Library of Rochester, NY said, "There's no resource more precious than a young child's mind, and the most important time to capitalize on the brain's neurodevelopmental capacity is in the first years of life, when children are making a million neuronal connections a second. Dolly Parton's Imagination Library demonstrates impacts on kindergarten readiness that are astonishing, particularly given the minimal cost of providing these crucial, high-quality

learning resources to families. As a pediatrician, parent, and founder of the City of Rochester's chapter of the Imagination Library, I am so grateful to Senator Cooney for his tireless efforts to bring this program to children across New York. Senator Cooney has been a stalwart supporter of our chapter since our founding, and his leadership in bringing this bill forward shows how serious he is about giving families the resources they need to ensure their children succeed."

Since launching in 1995, Dolly Parton's Imagination Library has become the preeminent early childhood book gifting program in the world. The flagship program of The Dollywood Foundation, a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, has gifted over 200 million free books in the United States, Canada, United Kingdom, Australia, and The Republic of Ireland. This is achieved through funding shared by The Dollywood Foundation and Local Program Partners. The Imagination Library mails more than 2.9 million high-quality, age-appropriate books each month to enrolled children from birth to age five. Dolly envisioned creating a lifelong love of reading and inspiring children to Dream More, Learn More, Care More, and Be More™.

The program has been widely researched and results demonstrate the positive impact on early childhood development and literacy skills. Penguin Random House is the exclusive publisher for Dolly Parton's Imagination Library.

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