

ASSEMBLY EDUCATION COMMITTEE

STATEMENT TO

ASSEMBLY, No. 5518

STATE OF NEW JERSEY

DATED: OCTOBER 15, 2026

The Assembly Education Committee reports favorably Assembly Bill No. 5518.

This bill establishes the New Jersey Imagination Library Program in the Division of Early Childhood Services within the Department of Education. The purpose of the program is to improve early childhood literacy by establishing a Statewide initiative to encourage eligible children to read. The program is to provide a high-quality, age-appropriate book on a monthly basis at no cost to any child enrolled in the program under five years old residing in the State.

The bill requires the Division of Early Childhood Services to partner with a national early childhood literacy foundation or an institution of higher education in the State to administer the program. The bill defines a “national early childhood literacy foundation” as a national nonprofit foundation, such as “Dolly Parton’s Imagination Library,” or a similar book distribution program, which exists for the sole purpose of working with local nonprofit entities to identify eligible children a reading selection each month to those children enrolled at no cost to the family.

Under the bill, the division is responsible for: (1) managing the daily operations of the program; (2) developing a process to enroll an eligible child in the program; (3) identifying and recruiting local qualified affiliates in the State to participate in the program; (4) assisting local qualified affiliates in the development, coordination, and promotion of the program in the community of the affiliate; (5) coordinating with each school district to advance the program and promote enrollment growth; (6) developing, coordinating, and promoting a Statewide public awareness campaign to inform donors regarding opportunities to financially support the program and local affiliates and the public regarding the program, including how to register an eligible child for the program; and (7) coordinating the collection and remittance of program costs for reading selections and mailings. The division may delegate, as it deems appropriate, these tasks to the partner entity.

The bill establishes the “New Jersey Imagination Library Fund” in the Department of Education. Under the bill, the fund is to be annually credited with moneys appropriated by the Legislature and any public or private donations. Finally, the bill appropriates \$2 million to the “New Jersey Imagination Library Fund.”

The Imagination Library was established by Dolly Parton in the late 1990s and is dedicated to inspiring a love of reading by gifting books each month to children from birth to age five, free of charge to families. This bill expands Dolly Parton's Imagination Library to New Jersey.