ASSEMBLY, No. 5518

STATE OF NEW JERSEY

222nd LEGISLATURE

INTRODUCED SEPTEMBER 17, 2026

Sponsored by:
Assemblyman WILLIAM F. MOEN, JR.
District 5 (Camden and Gloucester)

SYNOPSIS

Establishes New Jersey Imagination Library Program in DOE; appropriates $2 million.

CURRENT VERSION OF TEXT

As introduced.

AN ACT establishing the New Jersey Imagination Library Program, amending P.L.2000, c.139, supplementing chapter 6 of Title 18A of the New Jersey Statutes, and making an appropriation.

BE IT ENACTED *by the Senate and General Assembly of the State of New Jersey:*

1. (New section) As used in P.L. , c. (C.) (pending before the Legislature as this bill):

"Eligible child" means any child under five years of age who resides in the State.

"Local qualified affiliate" means any existing or new local Dolly Parton's Imagination Library affiliate or a local affiliate of a nonprofit organization dedicated solely to promoting and encouraging reading in early childhood for the children of the State.

"National early childhood literacy foundation" means 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 and provide a reading selection each month to those children enrolled at no cost to the family.

"Program" means the New Jersey Imagination Library Program as established pursuant to section 3 of P.L. , c. (C.) (pending before the Legislature as this bill):.

"Reading selection" means a high-quality, age-appropriate book mailed to an eligible child enrolled in the program on a monthly basis.

2. Section 2 of P.L.2000, c.139 (C.18A:44-6) is amended to read as follows:

2. a. There is established a Division of Early Childhood **[**Education**]** <u>Services</u> in the Department of Education. The administrator and head of the division shall be a person qualified by training and experience to perform the duties of the division and shall devote his entire time to the performance of those duties.

b. The division shall be responsible for:

(1) setting required standards for early childhood education programs in districts that operate preschool programs for three- and four-year olds that emphasize the quality necessary to meet children's needs, including, but not limited to, standards for teacher qualifications, program design and facilities;

(2) identifying and disseminating information on model early childhood education programs that meet and exceed high standards for program quality;

(3) the coordination of early childhood programs and services in consultation with the Department of Human Services;

EXPLANATION – Matter enclosed in bold-faced brackets [thus] in the above bill is not enacted and is intended to be omitted in the law.

Matter underlined <u>thus</u> is new matter.

(4) identifying the amount of funds necessary to implement successful early childhood education programs based on a comprehensive needs assessment;

(5) providing assistance, as needed, to school districts in implementing early childhood education programs;

(6) implementing the early childhood education orders of the New Jersey Supreme Court;

(7) overseeing the evaluation and monitoring of early childhood education programs in districts that operate preschool programs for three- and four-year olds; **[**and**]**

(8) providing, in consultation with the Department of Human Services, an annual report to the Legislature and public on early childhood education ; and

(9) administering the New Jersey Imagination Library Program as established pursuant to section 3 of P.L. , c. (C.) (pending before the Legislature as this bill).

(cf: P.L.2007, c.260, s.70)

3. (New section) a. There is established the "New Jersey Imagination Library Program" in the Division of Early Childhood Services in 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. An eligible child enrolled in the program shall receive a reading selection on a monthly basis at no cost to the family of the eligible child. The division shall partner with a national early childhood literacy foundation or an institution of higher education in the State to administer the program.

b. The division may require the partner entity to provide a matching amount of at least 50 percent of the funds required to implement the program.

c. The division shall be the entity responsible for the program, and may delegate, as it deems appropriate, to the partner entity the:

(1) management of the daily operations of the program;

(2) development of a process to enroll an eligible child in the program;

(3) identification and recruitment of local qualified affiliates in the State to participate in the program;

(4) assistance of local qualified affiliates in the development, coordination, and promotion of the program in the community of the affiliate;

(5) coordination with each school district to advance the program and promote enrollment growth;

(6) development, coordination, and promotion of a Statewide public awareness campaign to inform donors regarding opportunities to financially support the program and local affiliates;

(7) development, coordination, and promotion of a Statewide public awareness campaign to inform the public regarding the

program, including how to register an eligible child for the program; and

(8) coordination of the collection and remittance of program costs for reading selections and mailings.

d. The Commissioner of Education may promulgate rules and regulations pursuant to the "Administrative Procedure Act," P.L.1968, c.410 (C.52:14B-1 et seq.) to effectuate the provisions of this section.

4. (New section) a. There is established in the Department of Education a non-lapsing fund to be known as the "New Jersey Imagination Library Fund." The fund shall be used to provide reading selections to eligible children in the State through the New Jersey Imagination Library Program established pursuant to section 3 of P.L. , c. (C.) (pending before the Legislature as this bill).

b. The fund shall be annually credited with moneys appropriated by the Legislature and any moneys received by the department from any public or private donations. The department is authorized to seek and accept gifts, grants, or donations from public and private sources for deposit in the fund, except that the department may not accept a gift, grant, or donation that is subject to conditions that are inconsistent with any other law of this State.

5. (New section) There is appropriated from the General Fund to the "New Jersey Imagination Library Fund" in the Department of Education established pursuant to section 4 of P.L. , c. (C.) (pending before the Legislature as this bill) the sum of $2,000,000 to effectuate the provisions of P.L. , c. (C.) (pending before the Legislature as this bill).

6. This act shall take effect immediately.

STATEMENT

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 $2,000,000 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.