

Letter to the Editor- The Brookville American

I speak for our entire Imagination Library of Franklin County (ILFC) Board when I state that we have had an incredibly stressful past week. On Friday, February 14 we learned Governor Braun had eliminated all funding for the statewide Dolly Parton's Imagination Library program in the 2025 budget. Upon hearing this news, we reached out to several local organizations to get the word out. We also contacted our state legislature representative and senator; both responded later in the week with support for the program – this we appreciate.

To provide some background, our local program began in 2007 when Mr. Don Jobe formed a committee to learn about and initiate the program locally. It was supported by the Franklin County Retired Teacher Association, FCHS Book Club, and the Brookville Foundation. United Way of Franklin County served as the fiscal agent until ILFC became a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization in 2008. The first children were enrolled in ILFC at the Stayin' Alive Family Fun Day in 2008. Branson Russell was the first child enrolled that day, and ILFC was proud to celebrate with him as a FCHS 2024 graduate. The statewide program started in 2023.

Our mission is to encourage a love of reading and lifelong learning. We have done this successfully in Franklin County for 17 years by providing age-appropriate books to enrolled children who live in Franklin County - age birth to 5 years - at no cost to the child's family. The books are addressed to the child and arrive in the mail monthly. We applauded the state in 2023 when it made the program statewide & promised to share one-half of the funding with the local organizations.

Our number of enrolled children was from 365-380 monthly for several years before the state entered to increase enrolled children & provide one-half funding. Almost two years in, our enrollment has almost doubled (639- February 2025). In January alone we welcomed 38 new children—we are growing fast! Removing state funding would be devastating to our very successful program. We learned late Friday that the governor is tasking his wife to seek outside funding for the state's portion to ensure the success of this valuable program. We will follow this news carefully — and hope she is successful.

Dolly Parton's Imagination Library is a shared responsibility and successful program. Here is how it works: The Dollywood Foundation provides a Blue Ribbon Book Selection Committee to annually pick the age-appropriate books, provides and maintains the online book order system database, coordinates the monthly book orders & wholesale purchasing, mails the books to enrolled children, and covers all overhead and administrative expenses to achieve this "love of reading magic". The local organization (ILFC) makes the program accessible in our community, enrolls eligible children in the database, promotes the program locally, and PROVIDES FUNDS TO COVER THE COST OF BOOKS & POSTAGE. This should clear up any misconception that the books are free. To provide funding we rely on local donors (individuals, businesses, & civic organizations), grants, and board members working at annual events like the IGA cookout. Research shows it increases childhood literacy and promotes families reading together. It operates in the United States, Canada, United Kingdom, Australia, and the Republic of Ireland.

ILFC appreciates your support and hopes you will become a sustaining donor. It costs approximately \$30 a year to provide a child with an age-appropriate book - addressed to the child and arriving in the mail monthly - to truly develop a love of reading & lifelong learning!

Thank you,
Linda A. Rosenberger
ILFC President