May 1, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  The Honorable Charles Schumer
Majority Leader  Democratic Leader
United States Senate  United States Senate
317 Russell Senate Office Building  322 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510  Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Leader McConnell and Leader Schumer:

We appreciate the inclusion of $50 million in the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES) Act for libraries to expand Internet access in their communities. This funding is a vital first step in helping Americans stay connected during this crisis. As you consider the next COVID-19 response bill, we urge you to provide additional funding through the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) to support libraries.

Libraries are vital community resources. According to IMLS, Americans make more than 1.3 billion visits to public libraries each year, with all types of libraries employing nearly 370,000 workers and generating billions of dollars in economic activity across the nation, including the purchase of $4 billion in books and other materials annually. Unfortunately, due to the spread of COVID-19, the American Library Association (ALA) is projecting billions of dollars in losses to libraries, and without an immediate robust infusion of federal support, libraries will be forced to make massive cuts, both in terms of staffing and purchases. Furloughs of library staff have already begun. These library cuts would ripple throughout our communities, affecting support for education, workforce recovery, and access to computers and the Internet. To avoid the devastating impact of these cuts, the ALA estimates that $2 billion in funding is needed.

The resources libraries can provide to communities make them well-positioned to respond to this crisis. Even though many libraries are closed to the public due to restrictions imposed by the pandemic, they are still helping students engaged in distance learning, Americans who are now teleworking, and vulnerable adults and seniors who are homebound and need a lifeline to health information, government services, reading and entertainment, and other daily necessities, such as social interaction. Libraries are working hard every day to meet these needs by increasing access to digital educational content, computing devices, and broadband connections; delivering books; boosting e-book offerings, movie rentals, and other reading and entertainment resources; and hosting online story times, virtual classes, exhibitions, and discussion groups. Libraries are also leveraging their physical spaces to host local emergency planning meetings and serving as distribution points for food, medical supplies, student laptops, books, and hotspots. They are lending and using their 3D printers to print face-shields and related items for health workers. Other gaps libraries are filling include calling patrons who lack Internet access to check in on them, holding family reading programs on local radio stations, and addressing career development needs for those who have been laid off. Libraries, like other public and private institutions, are keeping up with this community demand for information resources while also experiencing lost revenue that will only deepen as this health and economic crisis continues.
After this crisis, libraries will also be key partners in recovery efforts. Small businesses and entrepreneurs will rely on library resources to reconfigure business plans and conduct market research. At the same time, many of the millions of new job seekers in economic distress will depend on libraries to apply for assistance and improve their job search and interview skills. Students and adult learners will continue to need library books, digital resources, technology access, and hotspots.

Given the critical community services provided by our nation’s libraries, we urge you to provide robust funding to IMLS under the Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA). The LSTA programs will allow relief to effectively and efficiently reach every state to meet local needs, particularly in low-income and rural areas. We are particularly supportive of giving libraries the flexibility to target pandemic-related responses, such as by boosting broadband connectivity through hot spots and other mobile technology, increasing digital content and computing devices, expanding programming to bolster businesses and workers, and supporting the staff needed to deploy these services and training. We also encourage you to include a strong minimum state allotment to ensure that small states receive sufficient and effective support, and to waive matching and maintenance-of-effort requirements.

With libraries across the nation taking the necessary steps to safeguard their employees and our communities by closing their doors to the public to mitigate the spread of COVID-19, we should do all we can to support library services, both remote for now and in-person in the future, when libraries are able to reopen. We thank you for your longstanding commitment to our public libraries and your consideration of our request as you craft the next COVID-19 response measure.

Sincerely,

/s/ Jack Reed
Jack Reed
United States Senate

/s/ Susan M. Collins
Susan M. Collins
United States Senate

/s/ Joe Manchin III
Joe Manchin III
United States Senate

/s/ Lisa Murkowski
Lisa Murkowski
United States Senate
/s/ Margaret Wood Hassan
Margaret Wood Hassan
United States Senator

/s/ Brian Schatz
Brian Schatz
United States Senator

/s/ Christopher A. Coons
Christopher A. Coons
United States Senator

/s/ Catherine Cortez Masto
Catherine Cortez Masto
United States Senator

/s/ Martin Heinrich
Martin Heinrich
United States Senator

/s/ Jacky Rosen
Jacky Rosen
United States Senator

/s/ Kamala D. Harris
Kamala D. Harris
United States Senator

/s/ Benjamin L. Cardin
Benjamin L. Cardin
United States Senator

/s/ Amy Klobuchar
Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator

/s/ Michael F. Bennet
Michael F. Bennet
United States Senator

/s/ Jon Tester
Jon Tester
United States Senator

/s/ Thomas R. Carper
Thomas R. Carper
United States Senator
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<td>Mark R. Warner</td>
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