

Senator Tom Harkin
Chairman
Subcommittee on Labor,
Health and Human Services, and
Education
Committee on Appropriations

Senator Arlen Specter
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Labor,
Health and Human Services, and
Education
Committee on Appropriations

Dear Chairman Harkin and Ranking Member Specter:

We request that you include \$300 million for the Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) and \$100 million for the Improving Literacy Through School Libraries program in the fiscal year (FY) 2010 Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education Appropriations bill.

Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA)

Every day across the country, libraries are straining to provide a broad range of services to meet the needs of their communities. Last year, libraries hosted more than 1.3 billion visits and circulated more than 2 billion items. This year, libraries are averaging 175 million visits per month. This increase is attributable to the downturn in the economy. Indeed, a New York Times article on April 1, 2009 stated “libraries have come to fill a void for more people, particularly job-seekers and those who have fallen on hard times. Libraries across the country are seeing double-digit increases in patronage, often from 10 percent to 30 percent, over previous years.”

Libraries serve a unique and important role in providing free access to all types of information and computing services. The demand for such services has grown in concert with the need to apply online for many jobs and government services. According to a recent report released by the American Library Association, 73% of all libraries nationwide report they are the only provider of free Internet access in their communities. In rural areas, 83% of libraries are the only free Internet provider.

Throughout the economic downturn, patrons have also been turning to their local library for assistance and access to essential information on a wide range of topics. LSTA funding is being used to provide training on résumé development; job bank web searches; workshops on career information; links to essential educational and community services; assistive devices for people with disabilities; family literacy classes; homework help and mentoring programs; and so much more.

Increased federal support for LSTA will improve the efficiency and cost-effectiveness of library services, enhance shared public access to information, expand computing access and the job help and skill building services that are so in demand, and recruit the next generation of librarians.

Improving Literacy Through School Libraries

Long regarded as the cornerstone of the school community, school libraries are no longer just for books. Instead, they have become sophisticated 21st century learning environments offering a full range of print and electronic resources to students, regardless of the socio-economic or education levels of the community. Students visit school library media centers 1.5 billion times a year. These visits, where trained school library media specialists help students gain critical thinking and information literacy skills, are integral to the learning that goes on in classrooms in the core academic subject areas.

The Improving Literacy Through School Libraries program, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act's sole initiative specifically aimed at upgrading school libraries, improves student literacy skills and academic achievement by providing schools with up-to-date library materials and technology, enhancing the professional development of school library media specialists, and expanding access to school libraries.

Since 1965, more than 60 education and library studies have produced clear evidence that school library media programs staffed by qualified library media specialists have a positive impact on student academic achievement. The Department of Education's January 2009 evaluation of the Improving Literacy Through School Libraries program found that it has been successful in improving the quality of those school libraries receiving the grants. However, in FY 2008, out of approximately 496 applicants only 60 grants were funded. In the seven years that grants under this program have been awarded, five states have never received funding. Considering that grants would be distributed by formula once the \$100 million threshold is attained, funding the program at this level will help dramatically improve reading achievement and information literacy skills among students in every state.

LSTA and the Improving Literacy Through School Libraries program provide critical funding for libraries of all kinds nationwide. Only by including \$300 million for the LSTA and \$100 million for the Improving Literacy Through School Libraries program in the Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education Appropriations bill will we 1) ensure that Americans of all ages have sufficient access to library and information services, 2) support the recruitment and professional development of the next generation of librarians, and 3) provide libraries the resources they need to improve literacy skills and academic achievement.

We recognize the difficult constraints you face and thank you for your continued support.

Sincerely,