

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 20, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
United States Senate
317 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Democratic Leader
United States Senate
322 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Leader McConnell and Leader Schumer:

As you develop the next bill in response to COVID-19, we urge you to include at least \$1 billion to address the impact this pandemic is having on access by Americans of all ages to their local library.

A recent Gallup survey found that Americans visited a library more frequently than going to sporting events, concerts, theatrical performances, and zoos combined. Indeed, according to the American Library Association, Americans make more than 1.3 billion visits to public libraries each year, with libraries employing more than 140,000 workers and generating billions of dollars in economic activity across the nation.

Unfortunately, COVID-19 has led to the closure of most libraries and the cancellation of countless public programs, as has happened across many sectors of our economy and society. Libraries, like other public and private institutions, are keeping up with community demand for information resources while also experiencing lost revenue. As the crisis continues, reduced tax revenue for state and local governments will significantly impact library budgets, and operations will be strained with increased need to support library staff, including part-time workers, and provide medical and family leave.

Despite these impacts, libraries are continuing to find innovative ways to serve our nation's local communities. Where library buildings are closed and services curtailed, the need for Internet access and digital services have only increased. Libraries are on the forefront of digital equity by supporting home broadband access, devices, and technical support. These activities are more essential than ever as more Americans turn to the Internet for telework, distance learning, health information, access to government services, reading and entertainment, and other daily necessities. Libraries are also poised to lead communities in their recovery in the coming months, and are ideal locations for helping alleviate economic distress for those out of work through job search and skill and career training, and for small business owners and entrepreneurs through business plan and growth strategy development services. Libraries are also well-positioned as the place for the distribution of community relief resources, materials, and information.

To support Americans' information needs in the months to come, we urge at least \$1 billion in additional funding for libraries to be distributed through Grants to States and Native American/Native Hawaiian Library Services programs under the Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA). These funding streams offers the flexibility to allow states and tribes to support their libraries according to local priorities, with a specific focus on COVID-19

response, like supporting distance learning; increasing digital content, access to computing devices, and broadband connectivity (through hot spots and other mobile technology); and addressing library workforce needs, and preparing libraries to help with the ensuing economic recovery when Americans are again able to look for work and reopen businesses. This funding should allow IMLS and libraries to establish or engage in existing partnerships with state broadband initiatives, local governments, schools, non-profits, telecommunication companies, cable providers, and other organizations for activities such as establishing Wi-Fi in neighborhoods, distributing devices, and enabling remote services. This funding should also include a minimum state allotment of \$10 million, be provided with maintenance of effort requirements waived, and should be accompanied by an additional \$25 million for the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) to administer these funds and conduct outreach, research, and data collection.

Americans depend on their local library for a range of services and information now more than ever. As such, we must support the ability of libraries across the country to effectively serve their communities during this national crisis and once we enter the recovery phase.

We thank you for your consideration of this important matter. Due to the closure of many Senate offices during the coronavirus outbreak, physical signatures are unavailable. The listed senators have asked to be signatories to this letter.

Sincerely,

Jack Reed
United States Senator

Ron Wyden
United States Senator

Sheldon Whitehouse
United States Senator

Tammy Duckworth
United States Senator

Mazie Hirono
United States Senator

Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator

Cory A. Booker
United States Senator

Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator

Sherrod Brown
United States Senator

Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator

Maria Cantwell
United States Senator

Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator

Edward J. Markey
United States Senator

Bernard Sanders
United States Senator