

# ALA American Library Association

July 1, 2020

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro  
Chairwoman  
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and  
Human Services, and Education  
House Committee on Appropriations  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Tom Cole  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and  
Human Services, and Education  
House Committee on Appropriations  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairwoman DeLauro and Ranking Member Cole:

We write to urge your support for the education, workforce, and economic development needs of Americans by providing \$232 million for the Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) and \$24.5 million for the Laura Bush 21<sup>st</sup> Century Librarian Program in the fiscal year 2021 Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education Appropriations bill. At this critical time, libraries are struggling to maintain high level of services to patrons and communities reeling from the COVID-19 pandemic and federal support is critical for libraries.

Libraries serve a vital role in our communities, offering free access to essential information on a wide range of topics, skills and career training, and computing services. Our survey of members demonstrates that nearly 100 percent of public libraries offer free Internet access. In rural areas, more than 83 percent of libraries report they serve as their community's only provider of free Internet and computing services. As communities and schools adapt to distance learning needs, libraries are helping communities fill these needs. Many libraries report moving Wi-Fi routers to improve access to parking lots 24-hours a day, providing hotspots for checkout, and implementing new and innovative streaming services.

Libraries, like other public and private institutions, are struggling to keep up with community needs for information resources, particularly during the national emergency. As the crisis continues, reduced tax revenue from state and local governments are already impacting library budgets and forcing furloughs for library staffs. At the same time, community demand for library services for economic recovery will increase markedly (as we saw during the Great Recession). The unanticipated and unbudgeted costs of cleaning and safe re-opening of libraries further strains library budgets and will cost libraries tens of millions.

Libraries, however, provide more than just Internet access. According to another ALA report, more than 92 percent of public libraries offer services that help patrons prepare resumes and conduct job searches. Libraries help entrepreneurs innovate with 3-D printers and makerspaces and create business plans and growth strategies through access to specialized collections for small businesses. They also provide tailored assistance such as services to veterans to help them access earned benefits and acquire the tools to re-integrate back into civilian life.

LSTA is the only federal program that helps public libraries meet community needs, provide enhanced services through technology, reach underserved populations, and retain librarians while recruiting new entrants to this important field. Consisting of a state formula program, which is amplified by a state match, and competitive grants, LSTA is more essential now than ever. With the passage in

2008 of the Museum and Library Services Act, Congress strengthened LSTA to support data driven tools to tailor services to address and meet community needs, help libraries prepare for and provide services after a disaster or emergency, enhance services for Native Americans, and recruit and train library and information science professionals from a broad range of backgrounds. The new law also enables increases in the Grants to States program to be shared more broadly across states, while ensuring no state loses funding.

We greatly appreciate the strong support for LSTA provided by this Subcommittee in recent years. By supporting funding for LSTA at its authorized level at this critical time will help ensure that Americans of all ages have access to libraries, Internet, and information services; the resources they need to develop literacy skills and achieve academically; and the services and tools to search for, find, and create jobs.

Thank you for your attention to this request and your continued support in sustaining and strengthening our nation's libraries.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Kathi Kromer".

Kathi Kromer

Associate Executive Director, Public Policy and Advocacy

American Library Association

The American Library Association (“ALA”) is the foremost national organization providing resources to inspire library and information professionals to transform their communities through essential programs and services. For more than 140 years, the ALA has been the trusted voice for academic, public, school, government and special libraries, advocating for the profession and the library's role in enhancing learning and ensuring access to information for all.