**Testimony of the American Library Association**

**Regarding FY 2021 Library Program Funding before the** **House Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies**

**Submitted by Kathi Kromer, Associate Executive Director, American Library Association**

**March 23, 2020**

The American Library Association (ALA) urges the Subcommittee to include in its regular FY21 appropriations bill at least the full authorized level of $232 million for programs under the Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) administered by the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), and at least $30 million for the Innovative Approaches to Literacy (IAL) program under the Department of Education (DOE).

Libraries, like other public and private institutions, are struggling to keep up with community needs for information resources, particularly needed during the national recovery. As the crisis continues, reduced tax revenue from state and local governments will significantly cut library budgets, and operations will be strained.

Libraries offer access to business development, skill-sharing sites and online resume building for those who have been recently unemployed, and access to telehealth resources and trusted sources for public health information. Many libraries also have hotspot lending programs to underserved families and students who do not have access to the internet at home. Some libraries are thinking creatively to provide services to patrons, such as streaming “story times” and author visits to encourage young children and adult learners to keep reading in their homes.

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 advancing learning and ensuring access to information for all.

            LSTA was reauthorized in 2018 with bi-partisan support in Congress. Improvements 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, improve 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.

            Libraries serve a vital and unique role in communities across the country by providing a growing range of services, including many on-line services making today's technology-focused libraries 24-hour enterprises offering much more than they did 20 years ago.

LSTA funding of at least $232 million will support your local library. Today’s libraries are in every district. If you haven’t been to a library recently, we urge you to visit your local library and see for yourself the range of services they provide your constituents. A few examples:

* Jobs and Careers – Libraries support patrons at all stages of their working lives so critically needed during the national recovers. Many library systems across the country offer workforce development services, including high school or career certifications, resume and job application assistance, and career and technical education programs.
* Small Businesses – Libraries propel entrepreneurship across the U.S. Entrepreneurs seek out libraries to develop business plans, access data to research emerging markets, or use 3-D printers and other technologies available in the library for prototype development.
* Early Learning and Literacy – Librarians nurture literacy development, beginning before birth. Libraries promote a range of literacies, offering family story times, access to new learning technologies and training for caregivers about the importance of early literacy and how to nurture pre-reading skills at home.
* Government Information – Librarians are stewards of government information. Libraries collect, organize, preserve and help the public locate, understand and use a wealth of information from their local, state, and federal governments.
* Internet Access and Skills – Libraries are community hubs for digital literacy and 21st century skills building. For the 28 million U.S. households lacking broadband internet service at home, the library is often the only place for access to computers and the internet.
* Access for People with Disabilities – Libraries support people with print disabilities by providing content that is accessible in both print and digital forms. Through a network of state libraries for the blind, libraries share accessible copies to ensure that library users have the broadest content available.

         The bulk of LSTA funds are distributed to each state through the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) according to a population-based grant formula. Each state must provide a 34% match and determines at the state level how to meet local needs and best allocate its LSTA grant awards. Libraries have used LSTA funding for a broad range of diverse and innovative programs that profoundly touch and better the lives of tens of millions of Americans in every state in the nation, including particularly service to people with disabilities, veterans, and job seekers. LSTA is truly a local decision-making success story and a shining example of how a small federal investment can be efficiently and reliably leveraged into dramatic state and local social and economic results.  Here are just a few current examples among many thousands made possible by LSTA over time:

* The Connecticut State Library a Museum of Connecticut History uses LSTA Grants to States funding to support the Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped. This grant allows the library to lend books and magazines in recorded format along with playback equipment, and materials in braille for free to any adult or child unable to read regular print due to a visual or physical disability.
* The Oklahoma Department of Libraries uses LSTA funding to support its Literacy Tracker, a web-based literacy tracking system. The program successfully tracks information and reading gains of adult learners.
* Caswell County Public Library in North Carolina used its grant to create a Learning Lab and Workforce Development Lab assisting local businesses access to tailored employment assistance, equipment, and access to a business and career center. A state-wide priority includes meeting needs of local business for workforce support.

        Patrons described above were the direct beneficiaries of the LSTA “Grants to States” program administered by IMLS. Grants support veterans, entrepreneurs, job seekers, taxpayers, children, and many others throughout our nation. The President’s proposal to eliminate LSTA funding, in fact any cut to LSTA, will jeopardize vital and highly cost-effective programs that benefit millions of Americans in every state, and help build our economy one job and one community at a time. These community resources are needed now more than ever.

Thanks to LSTA and other IMLS funds, many state libraries can support Libraries for the Blind and Physically Handicapped or Talking Book services, which provide access to reading materials in alternate formats. There is no dedicated federal funding stream for these individuals at the local and state level. LSTA Grants to States funding often fills this need.

           Accordingly, ALA asks that the Subcommittee provide at least $232 million for LSTA in FY 2021 to ensure that Americans of all ages continue to have access to important resources at their local library. ALA respectfully submits that there can be few, if any, more democratic, cost-effective and impactful uses of federal dollars than LSTA in the entirety of the federal budget.

            In addition to supporting LSTA, ALA also asks that you maintain the modest, but critical, federal investment of $30 million in the Innovative Approaches to Literacy (IAL) program, which was authorized under Every Student Succeeds Act. IAL provides competitive awards to school libraries and national not-for-profit organizations (including partnerships that reach families outside of local educational agencies) to put books into the hands of children and their families in high-need communities.

            Providing books and childhood literacy for such children is crucial to their learning to read, which is crucial to their – and the nation’s – economic futures. Studies have shown that developing early childhood reading proficiency is directly correlated to success in K-12 and college education and in careers. IAL also supports parental engagement in their children’s reading life and focuses on promoting student literacy from birth through high school. IAL grants have been awarded during the life of the program to almost every state in the nation.  Schools across the country have received grants, including the Bering Strait (AK) School District, City School District of the City of Elmira (NY), Mayetta (OK) School District 22, Cuero (TX) School District, and as well as many others.

            For families living in poverty, access to reading materials is severely limited. Children in such households have fewer books in their homes than their peers, which hinders their ability to prepare for school and to stay on track. IAL helps bridge that gap. Accordingly, we urge the Subcommittee to foster this work by continuing to invest at least $30 million in IAL.

            ALA understands the tight fiscal constraints on the Subcommittee, and we appreciate its continued dedicated support of LSTA and IAL. Thank you for your commitment to sustaining and strengthening our communities and our nation by supporting America’s libraries.