

Testimony of the American Library Association

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

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The American Library Association (ALA) urges the Subcommittee to include in its regular FY21 appropriations bill at least the authorized level of \$232 million for programs for the Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA), \$24.5 million for the Laura Bush 21st Century Librarian Program 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 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).

Libraries offer streaming support for business advancement, career development, 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 help underserved families and students who do not have access to the internet at home. Libraries are thinking creatively to provide services to patrons, such as streaming “story times” and author discussions to encourage young children and adult learners to keep reading in their homes. Libraries are leading the way in supporting student distance learning needs through 24-hour WiFi access in parking lots, homework help, mobile hotspots and other services.

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 funding of at least \$232 million for Grants to States and \$24.5 million for the Laura Bush 21st Century Librarian Program will support your local library. If Senators haven't been to a library recently, we urge Senators to visit their local library and see the range of services they provide constituents.

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 33% 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:

- Libraries across **Missouri** have used LSTA Grants to participate in the annual Beanstalk Reading Challenge. The Challenge provides customized reading support, books, tracking, and incentives for young readers at numerous libraries in the state, including Carthage Public Library, Little Dixie Regional Libraries, Rolla Public Library, and University City Public Library.
- LSTA Grants have supported the activities of the **Washington Digital Heritage** in carrying out a variety of digital initiatives focuses on archival and special collections of cultural and/or historical significance. These grants help preserve the stories of local communities and celebrate a common heritage.
- The **Alabama Regional Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped** has provided digital recordings and equipment, braille material, and services to more than 4,500 active patrons since 1978. LSTA Grants help make these services possible.

- **Caswell (NC) County Public Library** 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.
- Dr. Soohyung Joo, assistant professor at the **University of Kentucky School of Information Science**, was awarded a Laura Bush 21st Century Librarian Program Planning Grant for her work towards helping UK libraries examine research needs of patrons, librarians, administrators, and scholars. This research helped refocus the services and curricular provided at UK libraries.

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.

Native American tribes are eligible to apply for LSTA grants through the Native American Library Services program which currently accounts for more than 8% of LSTA funding. These grants support existing library operations for tribal communities, enhancing digital connections, supporting professional development, and promote lifelong learning for tribes. Recent recipients of these grants include the Native Village of Port Graham (AK), Aroostook Micmac Council (ME), Little Travers Bay Bands of Odawa Indians (MI), and Kat Nation (OK).

Accordingly, ALA asks that the Subcommittee provide at least \$232 million for LSTA and \$24.5 million for the Laura Bush 21st Century Librarian Program 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 and non-profits across the country have received grants, including the Bering Strait (AK) School District, The Children’s Reading Foundation (Kennewick, WA), Kansas City (MO) School District, 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.