

April 15, 2016

Testimony from Emily Sheketoff, the American Library Association, submitted to the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services and Education, and Related Agencies. Testimony supports funding for the Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) and \$27 million for Innovative Approaches to Literacy (IAL).

The American Library Association (ALA) is the oldest and largest library association in the world, with more than 58,000 members in academic, public, school, government, and special libraries. Our mission is to provide leadership for the development, promotion and improvement of library and information services and the profession of librarianship in order to enhance learning and ensure access to information for all. On behalf of ALA, I want to thank the Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies Subcommittee for the opportunity to provide comments in support of two important, long-standing, cost-effective and highly successful programs that assist and empower students, families, businesses, veterans, families with differently-abled members, and many others.

Specifically, we urge the Subcommittee to include in its appropriations bill \$186.6 million for the Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) under the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) and \$27 million for the Innovative Approaches to Literacy (IAL) program under the Department of Education (DOE). Both LSTA and IAL are authorized by Congress. Below are just a few examples, among hundreds, of the profound, day-to-day impact that Congress' modest but essential investment LSTA produces for Americans everywhere every day:

- One of the most fundamental roles of the public library is to help young children become future readers. To aid in this effort, the Missouri State Library leveraged its LSTA grant to embark on a statewide initiative called *Racing to Read*. The *Racing to Read* program, developed by the Springfield-Greene Public Library in Springfield features fun activities that help children get ready to learn to read by focusing on five basic skills: telling stories, talking and reading, singing and rhyming, playing with letters, and loving books. These activities are easily incorporated into a library's preschool story times, and are shared with parents and caregivers for use at home, at day care centers and with partner agencies.
- When returning soldiers in Modesto, CA, needed help readjusting to [reentering] the civilian world, the Stanislaus Public Library was able to step in and provide the transitional assistance they needed. The library used its LSTA grant to create a program educating veterans about the array of services and benefits available to them and their families. The library also has assisted vets with their online education and employment needs. The Stanislaus Public Library is one of 38 California public libraries offering a Veterans Resource Center, all of them made possible in part by LSTA funding.
- New businesses in Kings Mountain, NC struggled to survive yet were closing at a high rate. Local businesses in this rural community needed resources to more effectively compete. The Mauney Memorial Library used its LSTA grant to create the Downtown Kings Mountain Small Business Success Project, hiring a business librarian all of whose

time was dedicated to assisting local businesses in development of a successful 21st century market online presence. The Success Project's business librarian worked with businesses on learning to: develop business plans, manage social media, analyze marketing and other data, conduct market research, plan more effectively, and to improve safety and security audits. The librarian also helped individual businesses to develop professional caliber websites.

Without LSTA funding, these and many other specialized programs targeted to the needs of their communities across the country likely will be entirely eliminated, not merely scaled back. In most instances, LSTA funding (and its required but smaller state match) allows libraries to create new programs for their patrons, like those described above. Without LSTA underwriting, however, tight state and local budgets mean that libraries simply will not have the resources to institute and keep these programs, which are so valuable to so many Americans.

The beneficiaries of the many services that libraries offer are by no means limited, however, to the targeted participants in special programs like the ones just described, Mr. Chairman. Rather, America's nearly 17,000 public libraries serve an astonishing 4 million people daily in communities of every size and in every corner of the country. In addition to the kinds of veterans outreach and business-building assistance described above, libraries routinely also offer Americans from every walk of life ready and free access to all types of information, career and workforce skills training, digital and print literacy instruction, job searching databases, resume workshops, summer reading projects, creative programming for children, best practices training for local librarians, access to teleconferencing facilities, and 3D printers, and so much more. Indeed, according to an ALA report, more than 92 percent of public libraries offer services that help patrons complete job applications, create resumes, and access job databases and research. Libraries also provide resources and specialized collections for small businesses, which help them create business plans, develop new growth strategies, and research target markets.

Perhaps most critically, however, every day thousands of libraries across the country also provide no-fee public access to computers and the internet in some of our most distressed communities, both rural and urban. For the approximately 19 million Americans who cannot afford broadband at home, or who live in rural areas where the infrastructure does not support home broadband, libraries are an indispensable access point to the internet. According to a recent ALA report, 65 percent of all libraries nationwide are the only provider of free internet access in their communities. In rural areas, public libraries are even more critical, with 73 percent serving as their community's only free internet provider. Increasingly, the internet is the only means by which an individual can research job opportunities, take their GED, apply for a job, or submit government forms, such as tax filings or benefit claims. Many individuals could not even submit comments to this Subcommittee without access to broadband at their local library. LSTA funding often is what makes these services possible.¹

¹ LSTA also funds: the Native American and Native Hawaiian Library Services program to support improved access to library services for those populations; National Leadership Grants to support activities of national significance that enhance the quality of library services nationwide, and provide pilots for coordination between libraries; and the Laura Bush 21st Century Librarians program, used to help develop and promote the next generation of librarians.

The bulk of LSTA funds are distributed to each state through IMLS according to a population-based grant formula. Each state must match the federal funds received and determines for itself how to best allocate its LSTA awards, As the examples above merely hint at, libraries have used LSTA funding myriad diverse and innovative programs that profoundly touch and better the lives of tens of millions of Americans in every state in the nation. LSTA is truly a local decision-making success story.

During this time of increased and increasing demand, many libraries are under severe budget pressure. The support they receive through the LSTA, the primary source of annual funding for libraries in the federal budget, is thus critical to meeting the needs of Americans everywhere and, in so doing, building our economy one job and one community at a time.

Accordingly, Mr. Chairman, ALA asks that you and the Committee provide \$186.6 million for LSTA in FY 2017 to ensure that Americans of all ages continue to have access to the life- sustaining, -affirming and -expanding resources that their trusted local libraries provide. ALA respectfully submits, Mr. Chairman, 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.

Libraries, of course, also have tremendous impact upon the nation's children, especially our most needy, opening their eyes and minds to books and information of all kinds that help them gain and enhance literacy skills. Surveys show that many of our nation's children living in poverty have no books at home. These children depend on their local libraries' story-time and summer reading programs to help them prepare to learn in school and to succeed.

In addition to supporting LSTA, ALA also asks that you maintain FY 2016's modest, but critical, federal investment of \$27 million in the Innovative Approaches to Literacy (IAL) program. 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 activities to such children is crucial to their learning to read, which is crucial to their – and the nation's – economic futures. The program also supports parental engagement in their children's' reading life, and focuses on promoting student literacy from birth through high school. IAL was authorized under the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015.

Congress first recognized the importance of this program in FY 2012 when \$28.6 million was appropriated for early literacy support. In 2012, the U.S. Department of Education awarded two-year IAL grants to 46 nonprofit organizations and school districts in 21 states and the District of Columbia. In 2014, the Department made 32 new awards to national non-profits and school libraries. As with LSTA funds, school libraries and others are doing remarkable, valuable work with IAL support, as these brief examples reveal:

- The Waukegan Community Unit School District in Illinois sought to improve literacy achievement in this lower income community with a high percentage of families where English is the second language. The school's library used an IAL grant to implement its "Ladders to Literacy" program, and innovative print and e-book based curriculum that

also provided targeted literacy coaching and development for teachers. It measurably succeeded in improving participants' reading achievement.

- In the Milwaukee Public Schools, an IAL grant supported a project by its Focus on Literacy Foundation (nicknamed "FLF"). FLF sought to improve kindergarten through 4th grade literacy through innovative uses of technology, encouraging family reading-involvement opportunities, and the distribution of books to students with which they could expand their own home libraries. FLF was implemented at four low-achieving schools serving economically disadvantaged children who often had no books at home at all.

Studies show that strong literacy skills and year-round access to books is a critical first-step towards literacy and life-long learning. For American families living in poverty, access to reading materials is severely limited. These children have fewer books in their homes than their peers, which hinders their ability to prepare for school and to stay on track.

Congress has taken an important step in supporting the needs of disadvantaged students by providing IAL funding for book distribution, early literacy services, and effective school library programs. We urge the Subcommittee and full Committee to continue this important work by maintaining a \$27 million investment in IAL in the FY 2017 Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies bill.

ALA urges and appreciates the Subcommittee's continued strong support of LSTA and IAL, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for your commitment to sustaining and strengthening our communities and our nation by sustaining and strengthening America's libraries.