

ALA American Library Association

Senator Lamar Alexander
U.S. Senate
Room 455, Dirksen Senate Office
Washington, DC 20510

Senator Patty Murray
U.S. Senate
Building Room 154, Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senators Alexander and Murray:

Senator Angus King (I-ME) and Senator Shelley Capito (R-WV) took an important step toward closing the digital divide among our nation's K-12 students by offering Amendments 2153 and 2154. The American Library Association (ALA) supports these efforts.

Librarians know first-hand that access to broadband and the skills to put it to work are essential for educational opportunity and achievement today. These amendments to the Every Child Achieves Act addresses these issues head on for everyone concerned with ensuring our young people have the necessary skills to go on to college and into the workforce. ALA applauds Senators King and Capito in their effort to promote innovative paths to close the digital divide for our nation's young people.

The demonstration pilots authorized by amendment 2153 challenge educators in K-12 schools, in libraries, and those who work with youth in other settings to explore new ways to ensure learning does not stop when the school bell rings. ALA also is encouraged by the research requirement in amendment 2154 so that the impact of investments made under the Act will be truly measured and the best of the best can be replicated in communities across the country.

We see today's youth incorporate new and ever-changing technologies almost seamlessly into their learning experiences. They engage with digital content of all types—doing online research, developing web sites, creating blogs and videos, coding, and collaborating on original content in virtual communities. These technologies present tremendous opportunities to advance critical thinking and problem solving skills, creative expression, and STEAM skills for the 21st Century economy. But they require ubiquitous access to broadband—in school, in the library, and at home.

All our young people deserve the same opportunity to excel and to develop a passion for learning that will follow them regardless of the path they choose in life. Broadband can be a great equalizer—transcending geographic boundaries—but its promise only is fulfilled when all barriers to access and robust use are broken down. Libraries make strong partners and are committed to providing equitable access to digital opportunity.

Sincerely,

Emily Sheketoff

Executive Director of the Washington Office