

March xx, 2015

The Honorable Roy Blunt
Chairman
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and
Human Services, and Education
Senate Committee on Appropriations
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and
Human Services, and Education
Senate Committee on Appropriations
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Blunt and Ranking Member Murray:

We write to urge your support for the education, workforce, and economic development needs of Americans by providing \$186.6 million for the Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) in the fiscal year 2016 Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education Appropriations bill.

Libraries serve a vital role in our communities by providing free access to all types of information, skills training, and computing services. The demand for such services has grown in concert with the need to apply online for many jobs and government services especially as Americans have been increasingly unable to afford broadband in their homes. Indeed, even as the economy shows signs of improvement, patrons continue to turn to their local library for assistance and access to essential information on a wide range of topics.

Every day, libraries across the country provide no-fee public access to computers and the Internet in some of our most distressed communities. According to a recent American Library Association (ALA) report, 65 percent of all libraries nationwide say they are the only provider of free Internet access in their communities. In rural areas, public libraries are even more critical, with 73 percent reporting they serve as their community's only free Internet provider.

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 complete online job applications, create resumes, and access job databases and searches. Libraries also provide resources and specialized collections for small businesses, which help create business plans and develop new growth strategies.

Moreover, libraries expose children to books and information to help them gain and enhance their literacy skills. Numerous 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 succeed.

Unfortunately, during this time of increased demand, many libraries are facing cuts and severe budget pressures, leading to closures and reduced hours. 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. Robust federal support for the state formula program and competitive grants provided by LSTA is more essential now than ever.

This year, the President requested \$5.7 million more than the fiscal year 2015 appropriated level for LSTA, with the increase slated for developing and expanding cost-effective digital services to libraries and online access to resources and data to the public. We urge you to provide the requested level for LSTA in order to 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 continued support in sustaining and strengthening our nation's libraries.

Sincerely,