

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 2018 Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education Appropriations bill.

Libraries serve a vital role in our communities. Even as the economy shows signs of improvement, patrons continue to turn to their local library for free access to essential information on a wide range of topics, skills training, and computing services. 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 an American Library Association (ALA) survey, 100 percent of public libraries reported offering free Internet access. In rural areas, more than 83 percent of libraries report they serve as their community's only provider of free Internet and computing services. This access is critical at a time when applications for many jobs and government services must be filled out online.

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 conduct job searches. Libraries are also enabling patrons to innovate with 3-D printers and makerspaces and create business plans and growth strategies through access to specialized collections for small businesses. They also provide tailored assistance such as services to veterans to help them acquire the tools to re-integrate back into civilian life.

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 very limited access to 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. Consisting of a state formula program, which is amplified by a state match, and competitive grants, LSTA is more essential now than ever.

We greatly appreciate the support for LSTA by this Subcommittee in past years. We urge you to provide \$186.6 million this year and to prioritize funding increases for the grants to states program. Doing so will help 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.