

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

April 3, 2009

The Honorable David R. Obey, Chairman
House Appropriations Committee
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and
Human Services, Education and Related
Agencies
2358 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Todd Tiahrt, Ranking Member
House Appropriations Committee
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and
Human Services, Education and Related
Agencies
1016 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Obey and Ranking Member Tiahrt:

We request that you include \$300 million for the Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) and \$100 million for the Improving Literacy Through School Libraries program in the fiscal year (FY) 2010 Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education Appropriations bill.

Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA)

Every day across the country, libraries are meeting the needs of their communities by providing a broad range of services for people of all ages and backgrounds. Nationwide, recent statistics show that last year, libraries hosted more than 1.3 billion visits and circulated more than 2 billion items. Studies have shown that in times of economic downturn, libraries become even busier. More people, in more communities, in every state are turning to their local library for access to information and services to help them in today's economy.

Around the country, knowledgeable librarians use LSTA funding to help patrons access essential information on a wide range of topics. This funding is also used to provide training on résumé development; job bank web searches; workshops on career information; links to essential educational and community services; assistive devices for people with disabilities; family literacy classes; homework help and mentoring programs; and so much more.

Federal support for libraries encourages improved efficiency and cost-effectiveness of library services, enhances shared public access to information, promotes the use of technology,

encourages the sharing of resources, and results in other collaborations and outreach not feasible across local and state boundaries.

While Internet use has increased substantially in the United States, nearly half of all American households still do not have computers or Internet access. According to a recent report released by the American Library Association entitled, "Libraries Connect Communities: Public Library Funding & Technology Access Study 2007-2008," 73% of all libraries nationwide report they are the only provider of free Internet access in their communities. In rural areas, the role of the public library is even more critical as 83% of libraries are the only free Internet provider. As a result, many libraries have begun reporting double-digit growth in computer usage in 2008. Thanks to LSTA, libraries are also working to close the "digital divide" in many of our nation's distressed communities by providing no fee, public access to computers and the Internet.

Improving Literacy Through School Libraries

The skills needed to function successfully in a 21st century global workforce have gone beyond reading. Business leaders are concerned that people are now entering the workforce without information literacy skills – those skills needed to find, retrieve, analyze, and use information – which equip people with the ability to think critically and work proficiently.

Libraries have become sophisticated 21st century learning environments offering a full range of print and electronic resources that provide equal learning opportunities to all students, regardless of the socio-economic or education levels of the community. Students visit school library media centers 1.5 billion times a year.

The Improving Literacy Through School Libraries program, the first program specifically aimed at upgrading school libraries, improves student literacy skills and academic achievement by providing schools with up-to-date library materials, including well-equipped, technologically advanced school library media centers, and ensuring that school library media centers are staffed by professionally certified school library media specialists.

Since 1965, more than 60 education and library studies have produced clear evidence that school library media programs staffed by qualified library media specialists have a positive impact on student academic achievement. The Department of Education's January 2009 evaluation of the Improving Literacy Through School Libraries program found that it has been successful in improving the quality of those school libraries receiving the grants.

We urge you to significantly boost funding for the Improving Literacy Through School Libraries program to \$100 million. In FY 2008, out of approximately 496 applicants only 60 grants were funded. In the five years that grants have been awarded, five states have never received funding under this program. Funds at or greater than \$100 million would be distributed as formula grants to every state.

The Library Services and Technology Act and the Improving Literacy Through School Libraries program provide critical funding for libraries of all kinds nationwide. Only by including the President's request for \$300 million for the LSTA and \$100 million for the Improving Literacy

Through School Libraries program in the Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education Appropriations bill will we 1) ensure that Americans of all ages have sufficient access to library and information services, 2) support recruiting and educating the next generation of librarians, and 3) provide libraries the resources they need to improve literacy skills and academic achievement.

Thanks for your consideration.

Sincerely,

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