June 17, 2011

Dear Senators:

On behalf of the American Library Association (ALA), I am writing to thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Senate HELP Committee discussion draft to reauthorize the Workforce Investment Act.

We are pleased that the Senate is moving forward on this crucial job creation legislation. Libraries play an indispensable role in providing workforce development and adult education and literacy services in communities across the nation. However, we believe that libraries can play an even larger role in helping to meet the needs of our employment and training system if we strengthen the capacity of libraries to obtain support under the Workforce Investment Act.

Established in 1876, ALA is the voice of America’s libraries and the millions of people who depend on them. It is the world’s oldest and largest library association with more than 62,000 members who are primarily librarians of all types, but also trustees, publishers and others who support the work of the association. The network of chapters and affiliates for the ALA extends the reach and effectiveness of all of our collective advocacy efforts on behalf of libraries and library workers. Currently, there are ALA chapters in all 50 States and the District of Columbia and ALA members in every congressional district.

According to a study¹ printed by the Institute of Museum and Library Services last year, over 69 percent of U.S. residents age 14 or older have visited a public library at least once in the past 12 months. Not surprisingly, library visits are highest among the working poor (earning 100-200 percent of federal poverty guidelines) and those with income more than 300 percent of the poverty guidelines. According to the study, patrons reported using library resources and services to address a range of basic needs, including workforce development activities:

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• 30 million people used library computers and internet access for employment or career purposes;

• Among the employment users, 76 percent used a library’s computers or Internet connection specifically for their search for job opportunities;

• 68 percent of the users who searched for a job submitted an application online; and

• 46 percent of the employment users used library computers to work on their resumes.

In addition, the library is a welcoming place and the newly unemployed feel comfortable there, there is no stigma attached to being at the library. Families regularly visit because there is programming and events to occupy children while parents are looking for work.

As numerous stories in the press have revealed, because millions of Americans are out of, or seeking work, libraries across the country have adapted to help the unemployed. In fact, some big city libraries are renovating entire floors to make more space for job-hunters.

But because many local jurisdictions face funding shortfalls, resources for public libraries are being cut and many libraries will no longer have the necessary materials, technology, and staff to help those seeking better jobs.

Last year, the Department of Labor recognized the essential work that libraries have been doing to help improve the workforce investment system. Specifically, the Department issued a Training and Employment Notice to encourage collaborations between the workforce investment system and public libraries aimed at improving the quality and quantity of employment and training services to job seekers and unemployed individuals (http://wdr.doleta.gov/directives/attach/TEN/ten2009/ten50-09.pdf).

As the Department of Labor noted, demand for employment- and career-related services grew in the recent economic downturn and remains high today. Partnerships between the nation’s public workforce system and the library system can increase the quality and number of access points for individuals to receive needed career information and assistance.

The time has come for Congress to formally recognize the value public libraries bring to our workforce investment system. We urge the Committee to include the following priorities for reauthorization of the Workforce Investment Act to help support the critical role public libraries play in providing access to workforce development activities and information related to training services and employment opportunities.

**PRIORITY 1 – Ensure public libraries are included under uses of funds for employment and training activities.**

• Add coordination of employment and training activities with public libraries as an allowable statewide employment and training activity.

• Add public libraries as allowable service providers for local employment and training activities.

• Strengthen linkages between the one-stop delivery system and public libraries as part of permissible local employment and training activities.
PRIORITY 2 – Authorize demonstration and pilot projects to establish employment resource centers in public libraries to provide access to workforce development activities and information related to training services and employment opportunities.

- Libraries are already a crucial component of America’s workforce development system, but our capacity levels are reaching their limits. We stand ready to expand our services for individuals that need workshops on career information, adult education and literacy activities, and access to information to improve workforce skills if we receive additional support under this program.

PRIORITY 3 – Ensure public libraries are authorized to serve as allowable “additional partners” and “one-stop operators” under one-stop delivery systems.

- There are more than 16,000 public libraries across the country, most of which provide access to job/career information and resources. This is compared to roughly 3,000 comprehensive and affiliate “one-stop” centers supported through the Workforce Investment Act. Often times, one-stop centers refer customers to their local libraries for additional job search and workforce development assistance; making this change would allow libraries to play a greater role in the one-stop system.

PRIORITY 4 – Ensure public libraries are included as part of Local Workforce Development Boards and local plans.

- Add representatives of public libraries as allowable members of the Local Workforce Development Board.
- Include public libraries among Local Workforce Development Board coordination provisions.
- Include public libraries among local plan coordination provisions.

PRIORITY 5 – Ensure public libraries are included as part of State Workforce Development Boards and unified State plans.

- Add State agency officials responsible for public library programs as allowable members of the State Workforce Development Board.
- Ensure that the State has obtained input into the development of the unified State plan and provided an opportunity for comment on the plan by representatives of public libraries.

PRIORITY 6 – Ensure public libraries are included as part of the National Institute for Adult Education and Literacy Advisory Board and that Adult Education and Literacy Grants are coordinated with activities carried out by public libraries.

- Just as representatives of institutions of higher education are specifically included as members of the advisory board because of their involvement in adult education and literacy, we believe that public libraries should also be included because of their leading role in advancing literacy in communities across the nation. Public libraries provide free access to reading materials, workshops, classes, and other activities which promote a more literate society. Accordingly, it only makes sense to ensure that public libraries are included on the literacy board to ensure their important perspective on adult education and literacy is reflected at the national level.
PRIORITY 7 – Ensure “digital literacy skills” are included under the Workforce Investment Act.

- Successful attainment of digital literacy skills is necessary for individuals to succeed in the workplace. Digital literacy skills include skills associated with using technology and they enable users to find, evaluate, organize, create, and communicate information. Librarians across the country have seen first-hand that many individuals that are underemployed, or unemployed, lack these essential 21st Century skills. Accordingly, it is imperative that digital literacy skills are included in the Workforce Investment Act.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Senate HELP Committee discussion draft to reauthorize the Workforce Investment Act. Please see the attached Stakeholder Comment Form that provides legislative language to implement our priorities and let me know if you have any questions regarding our recommendations.

Sincerely,

Emily Sheketoff
Executive Director
Washington Office, American Library Association

Attachment: Stakeholder Comment Form
Stakeholder Comment Form

Senate discussion draft of the Workforce Investment Act of 2011

This form should accompany your organization’s comment letter. Please send both documents (as attachments to a single email) to ews@help.senate.gov no later than Friday, June 17th at 8:00pm.

Organization: American Library Association

One contact person: Emily Sheketoff

Contact email: esheketoff@alawash.org

Contact phone number: (202) 628-8410

In order of priority, please provide a full description of each item highlighted in your organization’s comment letter, including specific legislative references (e.g., Sec. 111(a)(1)(A)…), along with legislative language. Use additional pages as necessary.

**PRIORITY 1 – Ensure public libraries are included under uses of funds for employment and training activities.**

SEC. 234. USE OF FUNDS FOR EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING ACTIVITIES.

Recommendation – Add coordination of employment and training activities with public libraries as an allowable statewide employment and training activity.

Title II, page 118, line 21, insert new subclause (VI) and re-designate accordingly (new language in bold):

(VI) to coordinate with section 204(f) of the Museum and Library Services Act (20 U.S.C. 9103(f)) as appropriate, and to improve the coordination of employment and training activities with public libraries;

Note: Under 20 U.S.C. 9103(f), the Director of the Institute of Museum and Library Services is required to ensure coordination of Institute activities with activities under the Workforce Investment Act of 1988 (29 U.S.C. 2801 et seq.), including activities under section 134(c) [Establishment of One-Stop Delivery System] of such Act (29 U.S.C. 2864(c)).

Recommendation – Add public libraries as allowable service providers for local employment and training activities.

Title II, page 130, line 18, strike “and”.

Title II, page 130, line 19, insert “and other appropriate entities, such as public libraries,” after “providers” (new language in bold):
(ii) through contracts with service providers, which may include contracts with public, private for profit, and private nonprofit service providers, and other appropriate entities, such as public libraries, approved by the local board.

Recommendation – Strengthen linkages between the one-stop delivery system and public libraries as part of permissible local employment and training activities.

Title II, page 146, at the end insert new subclause (IV) (new language in bold):

(IV) to strengthen linkages between the one-stop delivery system and public libraries that provide employment and training activities.

PRIORITY 2 – Authorize demonstration and pilot projects to establish employment resource centers in public libraries to provide access to workforce development activities and information related to training services and employment opportunities.

SEC. 270. DEMONSTRATION, PILOT, RESEARCH, AND MULTISTATE PROJECTS.

Recommendation – Add new demonstration and pilot authority for employment resource centers in public libraries.

Title II, page 239, line 20, add new subparagraph (P) (new language in bold):

(P) projects to develop and implement employment resource centers in public libraries to provide unemployed and underemployed individuals access to workforce development activities and information related to training services and employment opportunities which may include –

(i) resume development activities, job bank internet searches, and workshops on career information;

(ii) adult education and literacy activities (as defined in section 303); and

(iii) acquisition of database licenses to improve access to career certification activities and licensing practice tests, and to improve workforce skills.

PRIORITY 3 – Ensure public libraries are authorized to serve as allowable “additional partners” and “one-stop operators” under one-stop delivery systems.

SEC. 221. ESTABLISHMENT OF ONE-STOP DELIVERY SYSTEMS.

Recommendation – Add public libraries as allowable “additional partners.”

Title II, page 8, line 1, insert a new clause (vii) and re-designate accordingly (new language in bold):

(vii) employment and training programs carried out by public libraries; and

Recommendation – Add public libraries as part of allowable consortium of entities that may serve as “one-stop operators.”
Title II, page 11, line 12, insert new clause (iii) and re-designate accordingly (new language in bold):

(iii) a public library;

**PRIORITY 4** – Ensure public libraries are included as part of Local Workforce Development Boards and local plans.

SEC. 117. LOCAL WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARDS.

Recommendation – Add representatives of public libraries as allowable members of the Local Workforce Development Board.

Title I, page 86, line 3, insert a new clause (v) and re-designate accordingly (new language in bold):

(v) may include representatives of public libraries; and

Recommendation – Ensure that in developing strategies for using technology to maximize the accessibility and effectiveness of the local workforce development system, Local Workforce Development Boards facilitate access through entities that provide free public computer and internet usage.

Title I, page 98, line 13 (new language in bold):

(B) facilitating access to services provided through the one-stop delivery system involved, including facilitating the access in remote areas, and access through entities that provide free public access to computers and the internet;

Recommendation – Include public libraries among Local Workforce Development Board coordination provisions.

Title I, page 101, line 22 (new language in bold):

(A) IN GENERAL. – The local board shall coordinate activities with and facilitate coordination of activities among education and training providers in the local area, including providers of workforce investment activities, providers of adult education and literacy activities under title III, providers of career and technical education (as defined in section 3 of the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act of 2006 (20 U.S.C. 2302)), public libraries that carry out relevant workforce development activities, and local agencies administering plans under title I of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (29 U.S.C. 720 et seq.), other than section 112 or part C of that title (29 U.S.C. 732, 741).

SEC. 118. LOCAL PLAN.

Recommendation – Add new “strategic planning element” for the local plan regarding an analysis of the delivery system of workforce development activities.
Title I, page 113, line 7, insert a new subparagraph (E) and re-designate accordingly (new language in bold):

(E) an analysis of the delivery system of workforce development activities and the user access points to such system; and

Title I, page 113, line 17, strike “(A) through (D)” and replace with “(A) through (E)”.

Recommendation – Ensure the local plan includes a description of how the Local Workforce Development Board will facilitate access to services through multiple access points, including through entities that provide free public access to computer and the internet.

Title I, page 116, line 4, replace subparagraph (B) (new language in bold):

(B) a description of how the local board will facilitate access to services provided through the one-stop delivery system, including in remote areas and through multiple access points, such as through entities that provide free public access to computers and the internet;

Recommendation – Include public libraries among local plan coordination provisions.

Title I, page 117, line 15, strike “secondary and postsecondary” and insert “and public library” after “education”

(10) a description of how the local board will coordinate education and workforce investment activities carried out in the local area with relevant secondary and postsecondary education and public library programs and activities to coordinate strategies, enhance services, and avoid duplication of services;

PRIORITY 5 – Ensure public libraries are included as part of State Workforce Development Boards and unified State plans.

SEC. 111. STATE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARDS.

Recommendation – Add State agency officials responsible for public library programs as allowable members of the State Workforce Development Board.

Title I, page 34, line 20 (new language in bold):

(III) may include such other representatives and officials as the Governor may designate, such as the State agency officials from agencies that are one-stop partners not specified in subclause (I) (including additional one-stop partners whose programs are covered by the State plan, if any), and State agency officials responsible for economic development or juvenile justice programs in the State, individuals who represent an Indian tribe or tribal organization, as such terms are defined in section 266(b), and State agency officials responsible for education programs in the State, including chief executive officers of community colleges and other institutions of higher education, and State agency officials responsible for public library programs in the State.

SEC. 112. UNIFIED STATE PLAN.
Recommendation – Add new “strategic planning element” for the unified State plan regarding an analysis of the delivery system of workforce development activities.

Title I, page 45, line 9, insert new subparagraph (E) and re-designate accordingly (new language in bold):

(E) an analysis of the delivery system of workforce development activities and the user access points to such system;

Title I, page 45, line 19, strike “(A) through (D)” and replace with “(A) through (E)”.

Title I, page 49, line 12, insert new clause (vii) and re-designate accordingly (new language in bold):

(vii) the access points, such as those provided by public libraries, to workforce development activities.

Recommendation – Ensure that the State has obtained input into the development of the unified State plan and provided an opportunity for comment on the plan by representatives of public libraries.

Title I, page 57, line 16 (new language in bold):

(II) that the State obtained input into the development of the unified State plan and provided an opportunity for comment on the plan by representatives of local areas, businesses, labor organizations, institutions of higher education, public libraries, other primary stakeholders, and the general public and that the unified State plan is available and accessible to the general public;

PRIORITY 6 – Ensure public libraries are included as part of the National Institute for Adult Education and Literacy Advisory Board and that Adult Education and Literacy Grants are coordinated with activities carried out by public libraries.

SEC. 342 NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR ADULT EDUCATION AND LITERACY.

Recommendation – Add public libraries to the National Institute for Adult Education and Literacy Advisory Board.

Title III, page 49, line 6, add a new clause (ix) (new language in bold):

(ix) public libraries.

SEC. 331. GRANTS AND CONTRACTS FOR ELIGIBLE PROVIDERS.

Recommendation – Ensure that an eligible provider’s activities are coordinated with appropriate activities carried out by public libraries.

Title III, page 32, line 25, add “public libraries,” after “institutions of higher education,” (new language in bold):
(9) whether the eligible provider’s activities coordinate with other available education, training, and social service resources in the community, such as by establishing strong links with elementary schools and secondary schools, postsecondary educational institutions, institutions of higher education, public libraries, local workforce investment boards, one-stop centers, job training programs, and social service agencies, business, industry, labor organizations, community-based organizations, nonprofit organizations, and intermediaries, for the development of career pathways;

**PRIORITY 7** – Ensure “digital literacy skills” are included under the Workforce Investment Act.

SEC. 101. DEFINITIONS.

Recommendation – Insert new definition of “digital literacy skills.”

Title I, page 9, line 23, insert new paragraph (14) and re-designate accordingly (new language in **bold**):

**14) DIGITAL LITERACY SKILLS.** – The term “digital literacy skills” has the meaning given the term in section 202 of the Museum and Library Act (20 U.S.C. 9101).

*Note*: Under 20 U.S.C. 9101, the term “digital literacy skills” means the skills associated with using technology to enable users to find, evaluate, organize, create, and communicate information.

SEC. 112. UNIFIED STATE PLAN.

Recommendation – Replace term “technological literacy” with “digital literacy skills” to ensure consistency with new definition established under section 101.

Title I, page 49, line 4, strike “technological literacy” and replace with “digital literacy skills”.

SEC. 234. USE OF FUNDS FOR EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING ACTIVITIES.

Recommendation – Add “digital literacy skills” to allowable types of “intensive services” under local employment and training activities.

Title II, page 131, line 22, add “digital literacy skills,” after “learning skills” (new language in **bold**):

(vi) Short-term prevocational services, including development of learning skills, **digital literacy skills**, communication skills, interviewing skills, punctuality, personal maintenance skills, and professional conduct, to prepare individuals for unsubsidized employment or training.

SEC. 303. DEFINITIONS.

Recommendation – Add “digital literacy skills” to definition of “adult education.”

Title III, page 2, line 20, add new subparagraph (B) and re-designate accordingly (new language in **bold**):
(B) attain digital literacy skills;

Recommendation – Add “digital literacy skills” to definition of “adult education and literacy activities.”

Title III, page 3, line 1, insert “digital literacy skills,” after “literacy,” (new language in bold):

(2) ADULT EDUCATION AND LITERACY ACTIVITIES. – The term “adult education and literacy activities” means programs, activities, and services that include adult education, literacy, digital literacy skills, workplace adult education and literacy activities, family literacy activities, English language acquisition activities, workforce preparation activities, or integrated education and training.

SEC. 331. GRANTS AND CONTRACTS FOR ELIGIBLE PROVIDERS.

Recommendation – Add “digital literacy skills” to “considerations” for awarding grants and contracts to eligible providers.

Title III, page 34, line 8, add “, digital literacy skills,” after “technology” (new language in bold):

(15) whether the eligible provider’s applications of technology, digital literacy skills, and services to be provided are sufficient to increase the amount and quality of learning and how such technology and services lead to improved performance; and

SEC. 342 NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR ADULT EDUCATION AND LITERACY.

Recommendation – Add “digital literacy skills” to dissemination of information activities conducted by the National Institute for Adult Education and Literacy.

Title III, page 43, line 1, insert “digital literacy skills,” after “integrated education and training,” (new language in bold):

(i) best practices and research regarding the provision of adult education and literacy activities, including instruction in the essential components of reading instruction, integrated education and training, digital literacy skills, and the integration of English literacy and civics education;