

# ALA American Library Association

September 13, 2011

The Honorable Patty Murray  
Co-Chair  
Joint Select Committee on Deficit Reduction  
448 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Jeb Hensarling  
Co-Chair  
Joint Select Committee on Deficit Reduction  
129 Cannon House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Senator Murray and Representative Hensarling:

On behalf of the American Library Association (ALA), I am writing to encourage you to maintain critical federal support for our nation's libraries as you begin negotiating the deficit reduction package required by the Budget Control Act of 2011.

Established in 1876, ALA is the voice of America's libraries and the millions of people who depend on them everyday. 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.

Specifically, ALA asks that you maintain funding for the Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA), which was reauthorized last December. LSTA is a population-based grant to states that is administered through the Institute of Museum and Library Services and serves as the primary source of federal support for our nation's libraries.

According to a study<sup>1</sup> 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:

- 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

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<sup>1</sup> Becker, Samantha, Michael D. Crandall, Karen E. Fisher, Bo Kinney, Carol Landry, and Anita Rocha. (2010). *Opportunity for All: How the American Public Benefits from Internet Access at U.S. Libraries*. (IMLS-2010-RES-01). Institute of Museum and Library Services. Washington, DC.

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

Libraries serve a unique and important role in providing users with free access to all types of information and telecommunications services. The demand for such services has increased significantly with growing need for access to digital and online information – including e-government services, continuing education and employment opportunities. In addition, the library is a welcoming place and the newly unemployed feel comfortable, 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 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.

Furthermore, many public libraries also are the place where a child is first exposed to learning. Education does not start when a child starts school, it starts at birth. Studies show that a child's brain develops the most between birth and age three. Most of the 16,604 public libraries in the United States support parents and caregivers with early childhood literacy programs designed to teach them how to read to children and help young children learn to read. Children who start kindergarten ready to read have a greater success throughout their school years.

LSTA provides critical funding for libraries of all kinds nationwide. Continued support for this program will: (1) help ensure that Americans of all ages have sufficient access to libraries, broadband and information services; (2) provide libraries the resources they need to improve literacy skills and academic achievement; and (3) help Americans search for and find jobs.

Congress needs to lead the efforts to ensure our nation's libraries have the funding they need to continue helping Americans. We recognize the difficult constraints the Joint Select Committee on Deficit Reduction faces, but we believe it is crucial to invest in our nation's libraries now more than ever.

Sincerely,



Emily Sheketoff, Executive Director  
Washington Office, American Library Association