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School Library Federal Funding March 2015

ALA's Position: The ALA asks the U.S. Congress for level funding of the *Innovative Approaches to Literacy (IAL)* program at \$25 million for FY 2016.

Innovative Approaches to Literacy

In FY 2015, the *Innovative Approaches to Literacy (IAL)* program was appropriated at \$25 million. By law, at least half of this must be allocated to a competitive grant program for underserved school libraries. The remaining money is allocated to competitive grants for national nonprofit organizations that work to improve childhood literacy.

President Obama's FY 2016 budget request to Congress on February 2, 2015 had no funding request for the IAL program. However, two Dear Colleague Letters are being circulated in the House and Senate to the Appropriations Committees asking that IAL again be funded at \$25 million in FY 2015. Last year, this letter in the House had 127 signatures from Members of Congress, while in the Senate a similar letter had 29 signatures from various Senators.

Background:

From 2002 to 2010, the *Improving Literacy through School Libraries* program had been the primary source for federal funding of school library materials in the U.S. Department of Education. However, in recent years the President and U.S. Congress have consolidated or zero-funded this program. A special thanks to Sens. Jack Reed (D-RI) and Thad Cochran (R-MS) who recognized that school libraries need a direct funding source in the federal budget – and in FY 2012, through report language in the Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education Appropriations bill, had the money redirected within the U.S. Department of Education for the IAL program.

With *Improving Literacy through School Libraries* being defunded, IAL has become the primary source for federal funding for school library materials. Focusing on low income schools, these funds help many schools bring their school libraries up to standard. Obviously this money is not enough to help every school library, but for many it does help with updating materials and equipment allowing children from disadvantaged areas have the best opportunities to become college and career ready.