2017 National Library Legislative Day Priority

Bring High Speed Broadband to Every Library and Support the E-rate Program Unchanged

The American Library Association asks all Members of Congress to:

1) Include high-speed broadband development in infrastructure legislation, particularly ways to leverage libraries to digitally connect and empower every American.

2) Support the FCC’s E-rate Modernization Orders of 2014 and maintain the program’s funding.

Why is high speed library broadband critical for Americans, especially in rural areas?

- There are more than 120,000 libraries of all kinds in the United States. Public libraries alone are visited more than 1.4 billion times each year. That equates to 3.8 million visits per day or 2,663 per minute. These visitors are veterans seeking help transitioning to civilian life, job seekers writing their resumes and researching opportunities, entrepreneurs working to take flight and create jobs, existing businesses seeking to expand, and families participating in summer reading programs (to name just a few). With tens of thousands of locations in communities of all sizes everywhere in America, modern libraries truly are critical national infrastructure.

- No matter the size of a community, high speed library internet access in the 21st century is vital to the personal and economic welfare of all its residents, particularly the millions of Americans whose only free internet access comes through their local library. Yet, fewer than 3% of all public libraries offer users a 1 Gigabit/second internet connection speed (the national goal) and only 4% of rural libraries can provide even a tenth of that speed. Moreover, 40% of rural libraries have no practical market option to improve that service because the costs of doing so are prohibitively high, often several times the cost of upgrading in urban areas.

- The economic health of our communities, and ultimately the global competitiveness of our national economy, depends upon rapidly and dramatically enhancing access for all Americans to high speed broadband connectivity. Leveraging the location, expertise and existing facilities of libraries to expedite its deployment, particularly in rural and underserved areas often most in need, is a cost-effective and efficient means of achieving that goal.

Why are the E-rate Modernization Orders, unchanged, important for libraries and the public?

- The FCC’s E-rate Modernization Orders of 2014 provided additional funds relied upon by libraries to enhance broadband and Wi-Fi service to the public (particularly in rural areas) and modified key program rules to afford flexibility in meeting patrons’ needs. The Orders also made several program changes to provide participants more funding certainty and facilitate long-term planning.

- The E-rate program works well for libraries and schools and need not be changed again now. Data indicates that, while only in their second year of implementation, changes made in the 2014 Orders are bearing fruit. Although libraries and schools are still learning how to best leverage new opportunities for securing high-capacity broadband and equipment, funding for rural applicants already has risen 45% (from $719.7 million in 2013 to $1.04 billion in 2015). Allowing these changes to take full effect would be prudent before considering altering the program again.