Testimony of the American Library Association 

Regarding FY 2019 Library Program Funding 

before the House Subcommittee on Labor, Health and 

Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies 

April 26, 2018 

The American Library Association (ALA) is the oldest and largest library association in the world, with more than 58,000 librarians and 120,000 academic, public, school, government, and special libraries in every state and Congressional district. Libraries are not-for-profit entities yet produce dramatic impacts for businesses and millions of Americans every day in communities large and small throughout the nation. ALA urges the Subcommittee to include in its FY19 appropriations bill at least $189.3 million for programs under the Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) administered by the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), and at least $27 million for the Innovative Approaches to Literacy (IAL) program under the Department of Education (DOE).

On behalf of ALA, I want to thank the Subcommittee for the opportunity to provide comments in support of two important, tested, cost-effective and successful programs.

The LSTA and IAL programs enjoy substantial and bipartisan support in both chambers of Congress. Indeed, the Subcommittee recently received Dear Appropriator letters supporting both programs signed by 136 Representatives for LSTA (as well as four additional individual letters) and 98 for IAL, indicating the wide and bi-partisan support for these programs.

Every year, public libraries are visited over 1.5 billion times: an average of 2,854 visits per minute. Libraries serve a vital and unique role in communities across the country by
providing a growing range of services, including many on-line services making today's technology-focused libraries 24-hour enterprises offering much more than they did 20 years ago.

With funding from the $189.3 million LSTA, more than 120,000 public, academic, government and other libraries advance Employment, Entrepreneurship, Education, Empowerment and Engagement (The E’s of Libraries®) in communities across the country.

**Employment:**
- 73% of public libraries assist patrons with job applications and interview skills.
- LSTA funds train school and public librarians to prepare students for today’s competitive job market by providing coding classes and other STEM activities.

**Entrepreneurship**
- Nearly 100% of libraries offer economic/workforce services; about half of those provide entrepreneurship and small business development services.
- LSTA funds allow entrepreneurs in rural communities to receive business development assistance from a skilled business & technology outreach librarian.

**Education**
- 98% of libraries provide formal or informal technology training.
- LSTA funds create a virtual reality lab at universities to provide access to emerging technologies for faculty and students.

**Empowerment**
- Nearly 100% of public libraries offer no-fee public access to Wi-Fi and computers.
• LSTA funds provide online exam preparation tools at libraries that would otherwise be cost prohibitive, enabling patrons to improve career prospects and advance their education.

Engagement

• 97% of public libraries help people apply for government services online.

• LSTA funds enable veterans to claim well-earned benefits to further their education, get medical treatment, start a business, and transition to civilian life.

The bulk of LSTA funds are distributed to each state through the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) according to a population-based grant formula. Each state must provide a 34% match and determines at the state level how to meet local needs and best allocate its LSTA grant awards. Libraries have used LSTA funding for a broad range of diverse and innovative programs that profoundly touch and better the lives of tens of millions of Americans in every state in the nation, including particularly service to the disabled, veterans, and job seekers. LSTA is truly a local decision-making success story and a shining example of how a small federal investment can be efficiently and reliably leveraged into dramatic state and local social and economic results. Here are just a few current examples among many thousands made possible by LSTA over time:

• An LSTA grant by the Oklahoma Department of Libraries supported a multi-year project to help Oklahoma public libraries assess and improve their technology networks. More than 50 public libraries received grants to support improvements in tools that improved network access, a service which has seen a huge demand increase.

• New Jersey State Library directs much of its LSTA Grants to States funding on resources that benefit all its residents across the state. Resources supported state-wide include the
New Jersey State Library Talking Book and Braille Center, JerseyClicks (statewide database licensing) and JerseyConnect (statewide technology support services).

- The Wilcox County (AL) Library receives an LSTA grant to support a pilot program that helps residents learn the skills to run small home-based or online businesses. The pilot proved so successful that the library was forced to find space for larger classes.

Patrons described above were the direct beneficiaries of the LSTA “Grants to States” program administered by IMLS. Such grants support veterans, entrepreneurs, job seekers, taxpayers, children, and many others throughout our nation. The unfortunate truth is, the President’s proposal to eliminate LSTA funding, in fact any cut to LSTA, will jeopardize vital and highly cost-effective programs that benefit millions of Americans in every state, and help build our economy one job and one community at a time.

Thanks to LSTA and other IMLS funds, many state libraries can support Libraries for the Blind and Physically Handicapped or Talking Book services, which provide access to reading materials in alternate formats. There is no dedicated federal funding stream for these individuals at the local and state level. LSTA Grants to States funding often fills this need.

Accordingly, ALA asks that the Subcommittee provide at least $189.3 million for LSTA in FY 2019 to ensure that Americans of all ages continue to have access to the life-sustaining, affirming and expanding resources at their local library. ALA respectfully submits that there can be few, if any, more democratic, cost-effective and impactful uses of federal dollars than LSTA in the entirety of the federal budget.

In addition to supporting LSTA, ALA also asks that you maintain FY 2018’s modest, but critical, federal investment of $27 million in the Innovative Approaches to Literacy (IAL)
program, which was authorized under Every Student Succeeds Act last year. IAL provides competitive awards to school libraries and national not-for-profit organizations (including partnerships that reach families outside of local educational agencies) to put books into the hands of children and their families in high-need communities.

Providing books and childhood literacy for such children is crucial to their learning to read, which is crucial to their – and the nation’s – economic futures. Studies have shown that developing early childhood reading proficiency is directly correlated to success in K-12 and college education and in careers. IAL also supports parental engagement in their children’s reading life and focuses on promoting student literacy from birth through high school. IAL grants have been awarded during the life of the program to almost every state in the nation. Schools across the country have received grants, including the Stilwell (OK) Public Schools, Crockett (TX) and Karnes City (TX) Independent School Districts, Sacramento City Unified School District, and, West Kentucky Educational Cooperative as well as many others.

For families living in poverty, access to reading materials is severely limited. Children in such households have fewer books in their homes than their peers, which hinders their ability to prepare for school and to stay on track. IAL helps bridge that gap. Accordingly, we urge the Subcommittee to foster this work by continuing to invest at least $27 million in IAL.

ALA understands the tight fiscal constraints on the Subcommittee and we appreciate its continued dedicated support of LSTA and IAL. Thank you for your commitment to sustaining and strengthening our communities and our nation by supporting America’s libraries.

Respectfully submitted,

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