

February 16, 2016

Appropriations Committee
Connecticut State Legislature

Written Testimony

The Connecticut State Library cannot afford any more budget cuts. For eight years, the Connecticut State Library Budget has been reduced- today its budget is only 75% of what it was in 2007. In addition, a critical program within that budget, Cooperative Library Service Units, has been cut by 47% and without sustainable funding cannot continue to bring enormous savings for libraries across the state.

Connecticut libraries' value goes way beyond the book- libraries for years have been addressing and filling critical community needs that remain after federal, state, municipal and corporate budgets are cut. We are the proverbial clean-up crew; we run free early literacy programs so when state, federal and local programs are cut our youngest citizens can still learn to read, we invest in computers in order to close the digital divide for people of all ages, we opened our doors and set up free information and enrollment centers for AccessHealthCT, and we help those seeking employment when employment centers hours are reduced and job training programs are cut. State Library programs and services enable Connecticut's libraries to continue to fill important gaps in services due to budget cuts in other areas. Library programs are a good return on investment especially during times of widespread state and municipal funding reductions.

As Business Outreach Librarian for 15 years at the Simsbury Public Library and as the current Executive Director of the Connecticut Library Consortium, I've gained first-hand knowledge of the impact upon libraries when crucial programs change or are eliminated at the state or federal level. While at the Simsbury Library, I helped thousands of people annually with their job search, to build their employment skills or to start or grow their small business. More than a decade ago when the process for filing for unemployment benefits went to an online system, many recently unemployed were left high and dry - without access to a computer and/or the skills to navigate an online system. Librarians like me sat next to these folks and helped them set up email accounts, learn how to use a computer and how to navigate the DOL system. This still continues today. Just last week a friend who hires for a large retail fulfillment center in Meriden told me her company initiated an all-online employment application process as a cost-cutting measure. She was frustrated because so many of her potential employees did not have computers. As a solution, she sends these folks to the local public library for help and to access a computer.

This story is repeated daily at every library in the state. Unfortunately, most of the general public has no idea their library fills this important need. Or that their library is able to allocate time and resources to address problems like this because of critical State Library programs. Libraries can't continue to quietly serve; we need to at least maintain our existing funding if we are to help the community when other programs and services are cut.

One critical State Library program, Cooperative Library Service Units, is another good example of how investing in the State Library is a great return on investment. The Connecticut Library Consortium (CLC) is the only Cooperative Library Service Unit remaining in the state. Last year, with \$315,875 in state funding we were able to negotiate discounts on thousands of library books, databases, supplies and materials saving Connecticut libraries of all kinds (public, academic, K-12 and special) more than \$7.2 million dollars. With these savings they were able to buy more books, run more free programs, employ more professional staff and continue to play pivotal roles in their communities.

One product, JobNow, gives millions of Connecticut jobseekers free access to a resource that helps them build resumes, prepare for interviews, and enhance their basic computer skills. Over 90 public libraries offer this online resource free to their patrons. Through CLC's negotiations on Connecticut libraries' behalf, these libraries can purchase the tool for the lowest discount available to any library in the U.S. As a result, even libraries serving our smallest communities can provide valuable job seeking assistance for their community. We saved the libraries almost \$100,000 total on this tool- almost half of what our current state grant is.

Connecticut libraries and the Connecticut Library Consortium have hundreds of stories and examples like these to tell. We are proud to be serving the people of Connecticut, but we cannot if our State Library funding continues to be cut. I hope you'll recognize that funding to libraries is a good return on investment. Please preserve Connecticut library funding!

Respectfully submitted by,

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