March 5, 2019

Committee members:

I write to urge you to increase funding for the State Library and specifically funding for Cooperative Library Service Units and the Connecticut Library Consortium (CLC). As the director of library services at Western CT State University, I have first-hand knowledge of the important role CLC plays in containing costs for library resources and services. As a member of the Board of Directors for CLC, I have a deep understanding of how this organization provides indispensable support to the library community throughout the state. In fact, through its cooperative purchasing program alone, CLC saved Connecticut libraries over $7.3 million in 2017-18 by leveraging discounts through collective buying power.

CLC received a 47% cut in state funding in 2015, and additional cuts in 2016 and 2017. The amount allocated for CLC for FY 17/18 and FY 18/19 was cut by another 33% due to holdbacks and rescissions. The same amount is proposed for FY 19/20 and 20/21, for a total cut of 64% since 2014. CLC has reorganized, reduced staffing, eliminated programs, increased member dues, and is currently using reserve funds to make up a portion of cut funding. And although CLC is actively working to diversify its funding so it is less reliant on state support, CLC is in danger of ceasing to exist in 3 years, causing devastating funding deficits for most of the public libraries in CT who saved almost $55 for every $1 they invested in CLC in FY 2017-18.

CLC is lean and mean: by employing a small staff that negotiates on behalf of over 750 libraries across the state, we reduce the effort, staff time, and cost of purchasing library products and services by individual libraries – and greater discounts are realized by Connecticut libraries thanks to collective purchasing power. Additionally, 1,765 Connecticut library staff members benefited from CLC’s free or low-cost professional development programs in FY 2016-17 ensuring the CT library workforce is prepared to meet the unique challenges facing their communities.

At the current state funding level for CLC of $124,402 (approximately 3.5 cents per capita), the savings for Connecticut residents via libraries stands at $7,320,548, indicating a return on investment of $7,196,146. Restoring CLC funding to the 2014 level of $332,500 (approximately 9 cents per capita), the savings for CT residents would necessarily be much higher. The case is clear: CLC is a smart investment for libraries and libraries are a smart investment for Connecticut.

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