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FY 2018 Testimony For the Written Record

U. S. House Committee on Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies

Subject: Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) Funding

The Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA), administered by the Institute for Museum and Library Services, provides critically important funding for our nation's libraries. The current LSTA appropriation stands at \$182,429,000. A small portion of this amount is allocated for discretionary grants, but eighty-five percent, or \$154,848,000, is distributed directly to each state and territory through a population-based formula. Each state identifies the most appropriate uses of these funds for library services and activities to meet their state's economic, educational, civic, and demographic needs. COSLA urges Congress to maintain LSTA funding at its current level. The return on investment for this program is substantial and is enhanced by each state's matching contribution. The innovations taking place in America's libraries today are a direct result of this vital and successful program.

State library agencies (which comprise the membership of COSLA) oversee the LSTA Grants to States program in their respective states. They work closely with public, school, and

other libraries to determine how to best allocate LSTA funds to deliver the greatest benefit to the communities in which they live. LSTA-funded projects and initiatives are developed with input from library users and from local and state leaders who understand that libraries are essential partners in advancing the educational, economic, and public policy goals of local and state government. LSTA projects implemented through libraries at the state and local level ensure that all members of the community – whether they live on remote tribal land in rural Oklahoma, in a small Rust Belt town in southeastern Wisconsin, in a quiet middle-class suburb on the outskirts of Boston, or in an at-risk inner-city neighborhood in Los Angeles – have access to the information they need to succeed in the twenty-first century.

LSTA funds are put to work in our states and communities in a myriad of ways that make a difference. In the educational realm, libraries use LSTA funds to support students and teachers in our nation’s public schools, to prepare the youngest in our communities to be ready to learn, and to provide learning experiences for children during the summer months to foster year-round education. LSTA funds make it possible for states that choose to do so to provide access to reliable, high quality, vetted research resources through a cost-effective statewide database program. While the online journals, newspapers, videos, and reference works licensed through these programs are available to library users of all ages at any time of the day or night, they are indispensable to elementary, middle, high school, and home-schooled students working on homework and extra-curricular assignments. LSTA funds also purchase resources and equipment to enable libraries to enhance the science and technology training students receive in the classroom. Hands-on after-school STEM activities, classes in robotics and computer coding, maker space labs that allow students to explore and create models for school projects are offered

to middle and high school students in libraries across the country thanks to the financial support that LSTA provides.

Many states use LSTA funds to support a variety of early literacy programs for pre-school children. These funds enable the placement of early learning activity centers in libraries, offer resources for story-time programs for toddlers, and fund coaching sessions for parents of pre-school children. Building early learning skills in our children is a priority for every community, and libraries are making an important contribution to our civic and economic future through their work in this area. LSTA also funds summer reading programs in virtually every library in the United States, ensuring that young people have opportunities to develop their minds over the summer months. In several parts of the country, libraries are partnering with agencies that sponsor food programs for youth in high poverty areas, adding a snack or meal to an existing summer reading program thereby nurturing children's bodies as well as their minds.

Virtually every aspect of modern life has a digital dimension, from online banking and securing employment to filing taxes and staying in touch with a family member serving in the armed forces overseas. Our nation's libraries are doing all that they can to make certain that every American has access to the internet and possesses the digital literacy skills he or she needs to function successfully in today's world.

Libraries are at the forefront of the movement to improve the nation's broadband access and they use LSTA funds to train their staff in new technologies so that they in turn can assist the public in making the most of the connectivity available through libraries. Twenty-first century digital literacy skills are the keystone not only for educational achievement, but for economic development, workforce readiness, and the health and well-being of our communities. This is especially true for older Americans and those with disabilities, who may need specialized

programs to help them become proficient in the digital environment. In most states LSTA funds cover the cost of programs that develop these skills, teaching members of the community how to use computers, computer programs, and the latest mobile devices. In addition, libraries help the public learn to navigate the information universe and evaluate and apply the knowledge they gain from digital sources to meet their personal goals and improve their own lives. Most states use some of their LSTA funds to operate programs for the blind and physically handicapped, providing audiobooks and special listening devices to keep them connected to and functioning productively in the wider world.

LSTA funding has made it possible as well for libraries to be proactive in offering much-needed assistance to job seekers and veterans looking to re-enter civilian life and the workforce. LSTA funds pay for career building materials and the purchase of software that job seekers can use to enhance their resume writing and interviewing skills. Libraries also hold job fairs and partner with workforce organizations to offer one-on-one consultation to the unemployed, leveraging LSTA funds to attract contributions to assist in this work from local businesses and state and local workforce agencies.

Working with local and state veterans service organizations, libraries assist veterans in identifying available benefits, help them translate military work skills to civilian employment, and help them reestablish community connections.

The LSTA program also enables libraries to foster entrepreneurship in their communities. The current and detailed online information resources that libraries purchase and make freely available to their users make it possible for aspiring entrepreneurs and small business owners to research their new ideas and potential markets, develop business plans, learn about emerging technologies, and obtain information about intellectual property. Many libraries have used

LSTA funding to establish business centers within their facilities, which sponsor ongoing professional development tailored to small business owners.

As important history and cultural heritage organizations, libraries hold a wealth of historically significant material documenting the evolution of their communities over time. The LSTA program underwrites many state and local digitization projects that make the letters, diaries, photographs, maps, architectural plans, service records, yearbooks, newspapers and other unique items available through our national digital platform. The digitization of locally-held materials enriches our understanding of the American past and also ensures that these manuscripts, images, and artifacts documenting the fabric of American life will be accessible to all and preserved for future generations.

These are just some of the many ways that libraries across America are putting LSTA dollars to work. Through the LSTA program, libraries advance local, state, and national priorities in areas such as education and life-long learning, employment and economic development, service to disadvantaged and underserved populations, ready access to digital information, and the health and well-being of our communities. America's libraries have a proud record of accomplishment in all these areas but they have not done it alone. The support that the LSTA Grants to States program provides to the nation through its libraries has been an essential component of this success. LSTA makes it possible for libraries to innovate, adapt quickly to local needs, and develop the programs and services that enable members of the community of all ages to thrive. Every community in every state has benefitted from this outstanding program, and COSLA trusts that Congress will recognize this by sustaining the LSTA appropriation in the coming year.