

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 1, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Majority Leader  
United States Senate  
317 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Charles Schumer  
Democratic Leader  
United States Senate  
322 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Leader McConnell and Leader Schumer:

We appreciate the inclusion of \$50 million in the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES) Act for libraries to expand Internet access in their communities. This funding is a vital first step in helping Americans stay connected during this crisis. As you consider the next COVID-19 response bill, we urge you to provide additional funding through the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) to support libraries.

Libraries are vital community resources. According to IMLS, Americans make more than 1.3 billion visits to public libraries each year, with all types of libraries employing nearly 370,000 workers and generating billions of dollars in economic activity across the nation, including the purchase of \$4 billion in books and other materials annually. Unfortunately, due to the spread of COVID-19, the American Library Association (ALA) is projecting billions of dollars in losses to libraries, and without an immediate robust infusion of federal support, libraries will be forced to make massive cuts, both in terms of staffing and purchases. Furloughs of library staff have already begun. These library cuts would ripple throughout our communities, affecting support for education, workforce recovery, and access to computers and the Internet. To avoid the devastating impact of these cuts, the ALA estimates that \$2 billion in funding is needed.

The resources libraries can provide to communities make them well-positioned to respond to this crisis. Even though many libraries are closed to the public due to restrictions imposed by the pandemic, they are still helping students engaged in distance learning, Americans who are now teleworking, and vulnerable adults and seniors who are homebound and need a lifeline to health information, government services, reading and entertainment, and other daily necessities, such as social interaction. Libraries are working hard every day to meet these needs by increasing access to digital educational content, computing devices, and broadband connections; delivering books; boosting e-book offerings, movie rentals, and other reading and entertainment resources; and hosting online story times, virtual classes, exhibitions, and discussion groups. Libraries are also leveraging their physical spaces to host local emergency planning meetings and serving as distribution points for food, medical supplies, student laptops, books, and hotspots. They are lending and using their 3D printers to print face-shields and related items for health workers. Other gaps libraries are filling include calling patrons who lack Internet access to check in on them, holding family reading programs on local radio stations, and addressing career development needs for those who have been laid off. Libraries, like other public and private institutions, are keeping up with this community demand for information resources while also experiencing lost revenue that will only deepen as this health and economic crisis continues.

After this crisis, libraries will also be key partners in recovery efforts. Small businesses and entrepreneurs will rely on library resources to reconfigure business plans and conduct market research. At the same time, many of the millions of new job seekers in economic distress will depend on libraries to apply for assistance and improve their job search and interview skills. Students and adult learners will continue to need library books, digital resources, technology access, and hotspots.

Given the critical community services provided by our nation's libraries, we urge you to provide robust funding to IMLS under the Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA). The LSTA programs will allow relief to effectively and efficiently reach every state to meet local needs, particularly in low-income and rural areas. We are particularly supportive of giving libraries the flexibility to target pandemic-related responses, such as by boosting broadband connectivity through hot spots and other mobile technology, increasing digital content and computing devices, expanding programming to bolster businesses and workers, and supporting the staff needed to deploy these services and training. We also encourage you to include a strong minimum state allotment to ensure that small states receive sufficient and effective support, and to waive matching and maintenance-of-effort requirements.

With libraries across the nation taking the necessary steps to safeguard their employees and our communities by closing their doors to the public to mitigate the spread of COVID-19, we should do all we can to support library services, both remote for now and in-person in the future, when libraries are able to reopen. We thank you for your longstanding commitment to our public libraries and your consideration of our request as you craft the next COVID-19 response measure.

Sincerely,

/s/ Jack Reed

Jack Reed  
United States Senate

/s/ Susan M. Collins

Susan M. Collins  
United States Senate

/s/ Joe Manchin III

Joe Manchin III  
United States Senate

/s/ Lisa Murkowski

Lisa Murkowski  
United States Senate

/s/ Edward J. Markey  
Edward J. Markey  
United States Senator

/s/ Tammy Duckworth  
Tammy Duckworth  
United States Senator

/s/ Elizabeth Warren  
Elizabeth Warren  
United States Senator

/s/ Cory A. Booker  
Cory A. Booker  
United States Senator

/s/ Angus S. King, Jr.  
Angus S. King, Jr.  
United States Senator

/s/ Maria Cantwell  
Maria Cantwell  
United States Senator

/s/ Sheldon Whitehouse  
Sheldon Whitehouse  
United States Senator

/s/ Chris Van Hollen  
Chris Van Hollen  
United States Senator

/s/ Doug Jones  
Doug Jones  
United States Senator

/s/ Debbie Stabenow  
Debbie Stabenow  
United States Senator

/s/ Robert Menendez  
Robert Menendez  
United States Senator

/s/ Ron Wyden  
Ron Wyden  
United States Senator

/s/ Sherrod Brown  
Sherrod Brown  
United States Senator

/s/ Richard Blumenthal  
Richard Blumenthal  
United States Senator

/s/ Mazie K. Hirono  
Mazie K. Hirono  
United States Senator

/s/ Kyrsten Sinema  
Kyrsten Sinema  
United States Senator

/s/ Tina Smith  
Tina Smith  
United States Senator

/s/ Richard J. Durbin  
Richard J. Durbin  
United States Senator

/s/ Jeanne Shaheen  
Jeanne Shaheen  
United States Senator

/s/ Bernard Sanders  
Bernard Sanders  
United States Senator

/s/ Tom Udall  
Tom Udall  
United States Senator

/s/ Tim Kaine  
Tim Kaine  
United States Senator

/s/ Kirsten Gillibrand  
Kirsten Gillibrand  
United States Senator

/s/ Tammy Baldwin  
Tammy Baldwin  
United States Senator

/s/ Margaret Wood Hassan

Margaret Wood Hassan  
United States Senator

/s/ Brian Schatz

Brian Schatz  
United States Senator

/s/ Christopher A. Coons

Christopher A. Coons  
United States Senator

/s/ Catherine Cortez Masto

Catherine Cortez Masto  
United States Senator

/s/ Martin Heinrich

Martin Heinrich  
United States Senator

/s/ Jacky Rosen

Jacky Rosen  
United States Senator

/s/ Kamala D. Harris

Kamala D. Harris  
United States Senator

/s/ Benjamin L. Cardin

Benjamin L. Cardin  
United States Senator

/s/ Amy Klobuchar

Amy Klobuchar  
United States Senator

/s/ Michael F. Bennet

Michael F. Bennet  
United States Senator

/s/ Jon Tester

Jon Tester  
United States Senator

/s/ Thomas R. Carper

Thomas R. Carper  
United States Senator

/s/ Mark R. Warner

Mark R. Warner  
United States Senator

/s/ Jeffrey A. Merkley

Jeffrey A. Merkley  
United States Senator

/s/ Christopher S. Murphy

Christopher S. Murphy  
United States Senator

/s/ Gary C. Peters

Gary C. Peters  
United States Senator

/s/ Robert P. Casey, Jr.

Robert P. Casey, Jr.  
United States Senator

/s/ Dianne Feinstein

Dianne Feinstein  
United States Senator