

**TESTIMONY OF MR. DAVID MACKSAM, DIRECTOR,  
CRANSTON PUBLIC LIBRARY, CRANSTON, RHODE ISLAND  
BEFORE THE SENATE HEALTH, EDUCATION LABOR AND  
PENSIONS COMMITTEE**

**APRIL 10, 2002**

Good Morning Mr. Chairman, Members of the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee. I am pleased to be here to testify this morning before the Committee on the question of the reauthorization of the Museum and Library Services Act of 2002. I would like to thank the Committee and you, Senator Reed for the opportunity to speak in favor of the swift reauthorization of the Museum and Library Services Act of 2002.

My name is David Macksam, and I am the Director of the Cranston Public Library in Cranston, Rhode Island. My purpose today is to request that your Committee reauthorize the Museum and Library Services Act, an act that includes the Library Services and Technology Act. We ask that you reauthorize LSTA at \$500 million to address more of the nation's library needs.

We appreciate the support that Congress has given to library programs since the inception of federal support for libraries in 1956 in the original Library Services Act. Since its reauthorization in 1996, LSTA has been responsible for some of the great innovations that have created change in libraries across the country. With the recent advent of new technology, LSTA has enabled libraries to participate in an electronic revolution of information retrieval. However, since 1996, the number of libraries included in the law has broadened to include academic and school libraries. In 1995, according to the National Center for Education Statistics, and the Bowker Annual, there were 15,273 public libraries to be served. In 2001, there were 129,561 libraries of all kinds that the funding was expected to serve.

How has the law helped people? Sometimes a story is better than statistics. In 1970, at another hearing for reauthorization of the then titled Library Services and

Construction Act, a library trustee, Margaret Warden from Great Falls, Montana, told the story of what the law did for Yaak, Montana.

“To residents of Yaak, Montana, it brought the bookmobile to the Dirty Shame, Jr. Saloon. A lady librarian, a modern-day pioneer, with only her little cocker spaniel for company, piloted her truck over a one-way mountain road to the Dirty Shame Jr. This name came from the original bar that didn’t have a name until someone came in, looked around and said ‘What a dirty shame.’ This name stuck and when the first building burned down, Jr. was born. Because this tiny town did not have facilities for a meeting place except the saloon, it closed as a bar and became a community library center during the day [the bookmobile came to town.] People flocked in, bringing potluck dishes, when the bookmobile lumbered in. Sometimes Inez would show a color movie or play light operas on records, or present a book review or travelogue. Armfuls of books, new and varied, were checked out and those in Yaak were given the privilege of library service.”

Just as the bookmobile gave the residents of Yaak the world of information and ideas, LSTA gives Rhode Island’s residents those opportunities today.

Cranston, Rhode Island is a suburb south of Providence, which borders on Narragansett Bay at one border and the rural highlands at one of our other borders. We are the third largest city in Rhode Island with a great emphasis on providing services to all our varied populations, from very young children to the most senior of our citizens.

I have been a witness for over 30 years to the effective role the federal government can play in the development of community literacy skills. In 1969, as a

Vista volunteer in Kansas City, Missouri, I worked in a drop-in tutoring center for adults and teens. In the 1970's as a librarian with the Enoch Pratt Free Library in Baltimore, I watched the utilization of Library Services and Construction Act funds (the predecessor of LSTA,) provide General Equivalency Degree tutoring in one of the first inner city library based literacy programs in Maryland.

Today, the Cranston Public Library, along with seven other library systems, receive funding from an LSTA grant that allows participation in RIFLI (the Rhode Island Family Literacy Initiative), a family literacy program for Rhode Island families facing barriers because of limited English language skills.

In each of these communities a different population was seeking educational opportunities. In Kansas City, Appalachians were moving north in search of better jobs; in Baltimore, a Black community was turned off by traditional educational methods, and in Cranston, newly arriving immigrant Asian, Hispanic and Arab populations are seeking jobs and methods of support for their families.

Rhode Island is enriched by recent immigrants from seventeen different countries, including Cambodia and Russia, so the need is great for programs and services for speakers of languages other than English. Federal funding has been instrumental in leveling the playing field for each of these diverse populations and has often been the catalyst to leverage additional foundation and corporate grants.

The flexibility of this legislation has allowed state library agencies, like that in my own state, to encourage children to participate in summer reading programs across Rhode Island. In 2000, more than 17,000 children participated. The program is in its 24<sup>th</sup> year and is an example of how federal dollars stimulate other contributions. In our state,

students from the Rhode Island School of Design compete to create the art for the materials and last year, the Corporation for National Service, Rhode Island READS, and 12 AmeriCorps Vista workers took the program out to community sites and organized reading partners programs. Do these programs work? Yes indeed, and the number of participants increases every year. These programs increase children's reading skills and keep their skill levels from dropping over the summer. Programs like these introduce newer readers to the enjoyment of reading and encourage children to explore a wide variety of reading materials. Studies show that children who participate in summer reading programs keep up their reading skills and improve them, while those who don't read during the summer suffer a drop in skill levels.

Another state literacy project funded in part by LSTA is called "Mother Goose Asks 'Why'?" This literacy and science series was originally developed by the Vermont Center for the Book and funded by the National Science Foundation. In the program's first year in Rhode Island, 100 families and caregivers were reached. In the second year, 268 families and caregivers were reached because of additional funding from LSTA. This literacy project empowers parents to share great children's books and related science activities with their children. It comes with books and science materials and a guidebook as well as free passes to the Providence Children's Museum and the Museum of Natural History and Planetarium, project partners.

The library is, as it always has been, the community center for education and learning.

In addition to summer reading programs, libraries, including mine have also focused on early childhood programs for day-care providers, parents and parents of new

infants. Reading to children is so important to their brain development and language formation, as well as in development of early-reading skills, so children's librarians are reaching out to the community to stress the importance of methods of introducing children to print, sounds and finger-games. With increased funding more of these programs could be conducted both on-site and in other parts of the community. We appreciate the First Lady, Laura Bush's, interest and attention to pre-reading and early reading programs.

The January 10 edition of *Education Week* (p. 21) quoted the National Household Education Survey, which shows that twenty-two percent of 3- to 5-year-olds are cared for in at least two settings outside their home in any given week, so library outreach to day care providers is extremely important.

Rhode Island has not forgotten the many seniors who depend on talking books and other materials like descriptive videos or large print books. LSTA funding also assists the state library in providing these services to eligible persons with disabilities residing in Rhode Island.

Our state is fortunate to have a number of great technology projects underway as well that will allow all libraries in the state to have access to special collections like the music score records at the Providence Public Library that are being electronically entered into a state online database, and the RLINK project (the Rhode Island Library Information Network for Kids), a network of school library media centers sharing an online catalog for resource sharing among themselves and throughout the statewide library network via web access.

As a small state, we applaud the suggestion that the base formula be increased, since it has not changed since 1970, when it was formulated. Our state, while small but powerful, can accomplish more and leverage more with additional federal incentive dollars. We appreciate your efforts Senator Reed, on behalf of libraries across the country, particularly your recent efforts for school library media collections. We know you understand why it is important to adjust 1970's dollars to reflect the costs and benefits of living in 2002.

Federal dollars help us develop particular program areas and are matched by state and local contributions. The programs developed are thus greater in size and reach a larger number of individuals in the community. I encourage you to reauthorize the Museum and Library Services Act in 2002, and give libraries the resources they need so that all communities, big and small, urban and rural can get access to the valuable programs and services libraries provide. Thank you for your attention.