INSTITUTE OF MUSEUM AND LIBRARY SERVICES

MS. MAYS: My name is Sheryl Mase and I work for the Library of Michigan, which is the state library of Michigan and I am the director of statewide services and in my division we receive the federal funds, the LSTA funds, and we run a virtual library called the Michigan eLibrary. It is at mel.org and we run that for all residents of the state and provide licensed databases and actually remote access to those for Michigan residents and we are also providing statewide resource sharing system we call MeLCat. We have trucks moving around the state and those kinds of things.

Also, we have the census function, the state demography, and we have statistical function in our area, of course, for library data and continuing education and youth services, support, that kind of thing.

And I love my job but lately it has been a little bit hard because of the economy. I know that you are interested in knowing what are the State of Michigan's greatest needs relating to the economic crisis and what the state and the libraries are doing to address that. You know Michigan has had a huge hit because of the auto industry, as you know, and manufacturing because that has been the primary source of economic stability in Michigan. I think Michigan is such a beautiful, wonderful state that I want

people to stay there instead of migrate out in mass quantities.

But what we have been doing is providing a virtual library for Michigan. It is called the Michigan eLibrary at mel.org and through that we provide many resources that we need to get the word out better about. And we provide something called Learning Express Library through MeL and it is practice tests for things like the GED, the SAT, the GRE, the ACT, civil service tests like nursing and military tests and credentials for electricians. Those kinds of things are on there. They have just added a whole mound of job inquiry sources on there and interviewing skills improvements. There are little tutorials there. So, we are providing that to all residents of Michigan through the Michigan eLibrary and they don't have to go to the library to use it if they are fortunate enough to have their computer and access from home or from wherever. They can authenticate that they are a Michigan resident with their driver's license number actually so we have been able to get that situated, probably about five years ago.

There are many people now even if they were able to afford broadband access in their home or Internet access they may be now out of a job and they may have to start cutting their budgets or maybe their home is foreclosed on

and they need help. So much of the information that we have out there and the resources are all electronic and they need the library. They need to come and use the public access computers and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation has helped in providing the actual physical computers over waves of grant funding and we have been involved in that from the state library in getting those funds out and those computers out into the public libraries, but the latest thing we find we need broadband access.

We are going to have summit next week actually, a library broadband summit, but we are not inviting only the library staff. So we have been planning to have the schools and the Department of Education at the table. I am at the table representing the Library of Michigan and libraries and we have the state police and the health care people. So it is quite a good group and we've got a statewide plan. We have been talking broadly with everyone in the state as many people as we can get to and tell them that we are working together on a collaborative plan and it is a really cool plan and we are hoping it has three legs. It does use libraries and schools and health care and community colleges as those anchors in the community for access to eGovernment information, job resources, health resources, all of these things, and high speed because you can go to a computer without that access and really be frustrated.

Speaking of frustration I will tell you the librarians in the field are having quite the experience dealing with these people that are just plain depressed. They are out of work. They are getting laid off. They can't pay their mortgage and so they have the foreclosure issues and they need help. They need resources. In Michigan many of these unemployment offices -- well, they are called Michigan Works Offices -- where the people will go and use the computers to file for their unemployment online, which is necessary. You have to do it online. Many of those offices have closed and actually the Department of Labor and Economic Growth has asked through me to assist them in sending out a DVD and I asked them to stream it online because it facilitates the access better. It is about how to file for unemployment. They have asked me to help get that out to all the public libraries. We have been trying for quite a long time to work with other agencies and state government departments to collaborate.

It is ironic because it has taken this long for the need to grow so great that finally people are turning toward libraries. Then, when we have them in the library, the staff has so many resources not only through the Michigan eLibrary that I have already spoken about but many of these libraries have career centers. They have small business support centers. Just so many resources when they

actually realize that it is there for them and we try and get the word out but we need collaboration to get it out so then we are able to assist.

I was saying these people are depressed and frustrated so the frontline staff in libraries are dealing from anything from high-level white collar people that have lost a job and maybe they need business resources or maybe they need something at a certain level but they may not have just certain basic skills that they are frustrated that they don't have or you might have somebody that just plain doesn't have any money anymore or health care and they need help too. I think the library community feels very good about being there and that's what we do.

We are there to provide the resources, the assistance, the materials that they need, the access to public computers, but at the same time our budgets are being cut. I don't think that people realize it. They don't think automatically. They think okay healthcare, fire, police protection, and all the things that need to be funded and not cut when the state budget is being cut and then the libraries are on the chopping block. We have done nothing but reduce for the last eight years to the point where we are so bare bones -- we are bare bones staff and what we do is try and support the staff out in the field and of course they are being cut as well.

Some of the things that we have seen happening have been private sector, corporations, companies that are willing to support our programs such as we have one state, one children's book program called Michigan Reads. It is a great early literacy program that we send out to all the libraries and the schools and Head Start programs. We send them a kit. We choose a book and then we write a guide to go with that that has all kinds of early childhood literacy program ideas and concepts and we mail it out to all of them and our sponsor is retail store. Then we have another program that is called the Museum Adventure Pass program and that is being sponsored by a retail store as well and that is in the Detroit area. People go the library and check out a pass to go to one of the museums. We have a new program starting that is called Park and Read and people go to the library to check out park pass.

We also have a Michigan Notable Books program that we get a lot of private support for and in Michigan we have a large committee that selects 20 books every year that are either about Michigan or by Michigan authors and then we get the authors to tour around the state and we have a lovely program, again, with the sponsorship of the private industry. That has a very nice partnership because it highlights what the public library offers but not just the public library but what the schools and the academic

and special libraries have to offer and sort of gets people aware of the resources that are available.

The biggest way I think we are helping is to provide the public access computers and not just stop there but to provide computer training and assistance that value added that the library staff can provide. The librarian's knowledge of how to access resources, how to find what specifically individuals are looking for, how to find retraining job educational resources or programs that they can enroll in that can give them certification. We need to get outside of the library building in order to collaborate ourselves.

So sitting at your library waiting for them to come doesn't always solve the problem either. You can have a large amount of resources and be very proud of what you have but they don't do much good if they are not being used. So I would say the outreach and the collaboration is really key.