

**Education & Labor Committee**  
**Subcommittee on Healthy Families and Communities**  
**September 11, 2008**

Chairwoman McCarthy and Ranking Member Platts, thank you for allowing me to testify today. I appreciate the opportunity to discuss how libraries are essential to America's 21<sup>st</sup> Century communities.

My name is Mary Clare Zales. I am the Commissioner for Libraries in Pennsylvania which is the position equivalent in other states to the state librarian.

I am also a member of the American Library Association, the oldest and largest library association in the world with 66,000 members who are primarily school, public, academic, and some special librarians, and also trustees, publishers and friends of libraries.

As Pennsylvania's state librarian, I am a member with my counterparts nationwide of the Chief Officers of State Library Agencies (COSLA). Its purpose is to identify and address issues of common concern and national interest; to further state library agency relationships with federal government and national organizations; and to initiate cooperative action for the improvement of library services to the people of the United States.

As Deputy Secretary for Libraries I lead the development of library services in Pennsylvania and oversee the State Library of Pennsylvania, one of four major research libraries of the state, that has recently completed a refocus of its mission placing an emphasis on its historic collections and becoming the destination library for Pennsylvania related materials and resources. Working most recently with various Commonwealth agencies and stakeholders, Pennsylvania completed the construction of a Rare Collections Library in preserving thousands of Commonwealth and national treasures. Among them is the 422-volume Assembly Collection purchased in 1745 by Ben Franklin and Franklin's 1754 *Pennsylvania Gazette* in which he describes his "Key & Kite Experiment."

I am here today representing the American Library Association, the Chief Officers of State Library Agencies, and most personally to represent library service in Pennsylvania.

I am proud of the role libraries play nationwide and of the role libraries play in improving and enriching the lives of Pennsylvanians. Pennsylvania has 458 public library systems with 635 library locations and 35 bookmobiles to serve our twelve million residents. There is a state-funded library meeting state standards in every one of our 67 counties with 97% of our population eligible for a library card without charge. Pennsylvania represents 4% of the country's population, and we have 5% of the nation's public libraries. As it is true nationwide it is true in Pennsylvania, there are more public libraries than McDonalds!

With this testimony, I would like to focus on how libraries are reaching new populations in new ways; and how their presence in the community is growing. First, I would like to say the time honored and traditional role of the library is intact. We remain a resource

and repository of the printed word. I believe reading and lending books will continue to be the fundamental role of libraries. That said, let us open the door of today's library and see the many ways they serve our communities.

Every day across the country knowledgeable librarians provide culturally diverse communities with a broad range of services for people of all ages and backgrounds. In Pennsylvania, anyone can come into a state-aided library and access the materials before them. This is true regardless of income, education, physical ability or address. Actually, even if you don't have an address, you are welcomed. And you are welcomed to remain anonymous. We only ask that you apply for a library card if you choose to borrow from the library or participate in programs.

Libraries in Pennsylvania, like libraries nationwide exist to serve. This means at the core, the mission of every library regardless of type or location is the same: to meet the information, education and enrichment needs of those they serve. And libraries serve the full community throughout the life cycle...from birth through the end of life.

### **Services to Children**

Libraries are often the first opportunity a child has to interact with books. Libraries across the country are providing important early literacy services for young children as well as a wide assortment of books, music, audiobooks, DVDs, computer programs, and so much more that can be used in the library or at home. Story times are popular as they offer preschoolers an engaging experience with books.

In Pennsylvania, we have a strong focus on infants, toddlers and children. I suspect this committee in particular is aware of the emerging brain research which demonstrates that pre-literacy experiences are irreplaceable in a child's brain development and influences academic success. The absence of pre-literacy experiences has an impact on career success and ultimately impacts the health and vitality of our families, communities and our nation

The library community of Pennsylvania recognized the need to incorporate these findings in our programming. As a result, we initiated the *One Book, Every Young Child* program using the one-book-one-community model. Every April we select a pre-literacy book that will be read to young children across the Commonwealth. The program prompts child care centers, pre-schools and libraries to plan events and activities related to the theme of the selected book which will engage children, parents and caregivers in early reading practices.

This year's title was read to 21,000 children in home-based child care and class-based early care and education programs in addition to being read in virtually all our public libraries. All 67 counties participated in *One Book Every Young Child* events and over 90,000 copies of the book were distributed through libraries and their community partners. In all, approximately 560,000 preschool children were reached this year by the program. We are working with pediatricians and health care clinics to put a copy of the

One Book title in waiting rooms across the state. I am proud to report our *One Book Every Young Child* program won the 2007 John Cotton Dana award, one of the most prestigious awards bestowed by the American Library Association. Since 2004, we have sponsored an Early Learning Forum and Best Practices Awards program each year. Identifying best practices and providing evidence of the importance of early literacy has elevated children's programming statewide. Over 30 years of research confirms the foundational importance of early education and care for children's school and life success.

If we expect our students to achieve high levels, we must start them off early and start them off right. Early education and care provide a critical focus for our efforts. Strong libraries play a vital role in this early learning for tens of thousands of Pennsylvania families.

Pennsylvania is proud to participate in the national Family Place Program that builds on the role of the library as the core of the community. Family Place Libraries reserve physical space in the library to conduct programs for young children and their parents, bringing them together with community resources and professionals in child development. In Doylestown, Pennsylvania, a parent attending Family Place Programs at the Bucks County Free Library commented that "I thought that the library just had to do with reading and books. This was a different opportunity for using toys, play and social interaction. The library has a bigger role. You went beyond what I expected."

The Yeadon Public Library in Delaware County reported that during a Family Place workshop a mother expressed strong concern about her son who was diagnosed with autism. The library connected the parent with child development specialists and the next week her son was receiving assistance. Pennsylvania leads the nation in the number of Family Place Libraries.

A perennially popular children's program is the Summer Reading program which is now more than one hundred years old. It is also the very first program public libraries offered and it began in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. This summer in Pennsylvania, more than 280,000 children of all ages joined with children nationwide and in American military bases to read under a common theme.

The work on behalf of our children is the most important work we do. This emphasis in Pennsylvania is reflected in the Sullivan Award for Public Library Administrators Supporting Services to Children having been awarded in 2006 to Janice Trapp, Director of the Lycoming County Library System in Williamsport, PA. An example of one program at her library is "Celebrating the Birth of Each Child." When each of the 1,500 or so babies born each year in Lycoming County leaves the hospital, mom takes home a tiny backpack, courtesy of a community-funded program of the library. Inside is information about library programs, a book, a stuffed animal—and a Baby Library Card.

## **Services to Seniors and Special Populations**

Older adults enjoy the many services and resources of the public library. From book clubs to health seminars to travel and medical resources, older Pennsylvanians like older adults nationwide feel right at home in their public library. For example, the Adams County Library System is one of many libraries that partner with American Association of Retired People (AARP) to offer seniors tax services to more than 500 seniors. In Cumberland County the library system and Hospice of Central Pennsylvania developed a partnership to provide homebound service to hospice clients and their families.

Libraries also provide important community services and programs for non-English speakers. Nationwide 78% of libraries reported Spanish as the main non-English language used in the library. Libraries work with the Spanish-speaking community by offering specially developed story times and Spanish and bilingual library materials.

Public libraries partner with the National Library Services for the Blind and Physically Handicapped in the Library of Congress to serve those who cannot use a traditional book due to visual or physical handicaps. This program opens up the world of books to Americans with disabilities that would otherwise make it impossible for them to read. Though traditionally viewed as a service to the aging community, in Pennsylvania alone there are 261,000 children between the ages of three and eighteen, many of whom would not be able to succeed in school without recorded materials.

The two Regional Libraries for the Blind and Physically Handicapped in Pennsylvania located in Philadelphia and Pittsburgh lend two million recorded, Braille and large print books and magazines each year. The Libraries for the Blind and Physically Handicapped reach out to those in short term and long term need with the most recent outreach being to returning soldiers

Currently the National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped is undertaking a transition from a cassette based format to a new digital format that will be much easier to use and offer a downloadable option.

Helen Jane Kane of Butler County in Pennsylvania captured the intrinsic value of this service when she said: “The books have really helped me keep a more positive mental attitude and added another dimension to my life.” Grace Bussler, also from Butler County, added “These books have been a godsend to not just me but my family also, because if I’m happy and satisfied, so are they.”

## **Libraries and Technology**

While computer use has increased substantially in the United States, many American households still do not have home computers or home Internet access. Libraries are working to close this “digital divide” in many of our nation’s distressed communities by

providing no-fee, public access to computers and the Internet. Nationwide 73% of all libraries report they are the only provider of free Internet access in their communities. In rural areas, the role of the library is even more critical as 83% of libraries are the only free Internet provider.

The report “Libraries Connect Communities: Public Library Funding & Technology Access Study 2007-2008” was released last week. This report assesses public access to computers, the Internet and Internet-related services in public libraries of the United States, and the impact of library funding changes on connectivity, technology deployment and sustainability. Chairwoman McCarthy, I request the executive summary of the report be submitted into the record as Appendix A of this testimony.

The report found that America’s 16,543 public library buildings are leveraging technology to help students of all ages succeed in school and support lifelong learning. More than 83% of libraries now offer online homework resources, including live tutors and collections of reliable Web sources – an increase of 15% in one year. Libraries also reported significant increases in the number of audiobooks and podcasts (33% increase) videos (32% increase), e-books (13.5% increase) and digitized special collections (13% increase). As Americans are changing the ways they meet their educational, entrepreneurial and entertainment needs, libraries are changing with them and making access more convenient in person and with expanding services online.

As stated in the report, a student in Kentucky without a computer or Internet at home used her public library and the free online tutoring program every week of her last two years of high school to assist with AP level courses in algebra and physics. Heather told library staff her grades went up and her stress levels went down because of the library services and resource. Heather is now in college and has plans for medical school.

A Pew Foundation study on how Americans search for information was released in December.<sup>1</sup> The study showed people who used the Internet were more likely to use the library than people who do not use the Internet. This was true regardless of income.

This refutes the supposition by some that the Internet will render libraries obsolete. This study also revealed significant new information on who is using our libraries. Traditionally, the profile of the library user was a middle-aged female. This study shows a dramatic shift in that profile to young people ages 18 to 30. This shift indicates two current realities about our libraries 1) libraries are successful in offering technology that attracts younger users and 2) it charges libraries with keeping pace with emerging technologies to continue to support the information needs of young adults as they grow into adulthood.

Libraries use technology to link communities around the country and provide users access to information through state, regional, national and international networks. Many

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<sup>1</sup> Leigh Estabrook, Evans Witt, and Lee Rainee, “Information Searches That Solve Problems: How people use the Internet, libraries, and government agencies when they need help,” (Pew Internet and American Life Project, December 30, 2007). Available on the Internet at [http://www.pewinternet.org/PPF/r/231/report\\_display.asp](http://www.pewinternet.org/PPF/r/231/report_display.asp).

states offer a statewide network to provide enriched content databases and to open access to resources statewide. Pennsylvania offers three major programs that support the use of emerging technology and open access to on-line, vetted databases.

The Pennsylvania On-line World of Electronic Resources - POWER Library - allows access to authoritative resources for children, students and adults through their school or public library or remotely through the public library website. The POWER Library extends access to journals, e-books, dictionaries, encyclopedias, the AP photo archive and much, much more. Last year over 35 million articles and items were examined, which is a 71% increase in usage over the past three years.

Pennsylvania also offers a statewide electronic library catalog called the Access Pennsylvania Database. This on-line catalog shows the holdings of more than 3,000 school, public, academic and special libraries throughout Pennsylvania. The database has more than 67 million holdings and 15 million unique titles.

Virtual reference service is a relatively recent addition to Pennsylvania's on-line services. The *Ask Here PA* program was launched in September 2006 as a virtual reference service available to all residents twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. There is a second tier to the *Ask Here PA* program for college level and more in-depth questions. To date, over 42,000 live chat questions were asked. If this level of activity continues through December 2008, as it is expected to, *Ask Here PA* will be the most active virtual reference service in the nation. Greater than 50% of the activity is from Pennsylvania's students.

Through these programs in particular, Pennsylvania's libraries, like a growing number of libraries nationwide, are now serving our communities 24-7 - The library never closes!

### **Libraries and Economic Development**

Libraries play a valued role in the business community. In a growing number of communities, libraries are opening business branches offering specialized collections, providing business-specific training in discerning credible research, studies, even grant opportunities as well as assisting with business development initiatives.

For many small businesses, the library is the source for research and a specially trained and experienced staff they could not otherwise afford. Greg Skoog credits the Hickory Public Library in North Carolina for getting his transport company started. He used books from the library on writing a business plan and cash flow analysis; he used the Internet for research and wrote his business plan. Mr. Skoog said that basically, the library was his office for three weeks. He now employs 135 people.

## **Libraries in Tough Economic Times**

The public library plays an even more important role as Americans are facing tough economic times. Library usage is up ten percent from the last economic downturn in 2001. Debbie Long of West Goshen in Chester County, Pennsylvania noted the price of borrowing one hardback book from the library saves her enough to fill her gas tank halfway. So this year, she is frequenting the West Chester Public Library instead of the bookstore. "Between the price of gas and that little extra money that we've lost, I'm not buying books and music like I used to." She is driving to her nearby library and using its free services. "I love it," she says.

Patrons are visiting their library for more than the borrow of free books. Libraries offer databases with job listings, training on resume development, techniques for interviewing and 21<sup>st</sup> century skills needed to get that new job. The Washoe County Library System's Community Resource Center in Nevada helped Stephanie D'Arcy, who hadn't had full-time employment for several months; successfully get a job with the local parks and recreation department. "I needed guidance," D'Arcy said. "The library staff offered me encouragement and assistance filling out the application, including pointing out the transferable skills I could list, plus some tips for interviewing. If it were not for the library's help, I wouldn't be where I am today."

That library attendance has increased is not a surprise. Studies from generation to generation have shown that in times of economic downturn, libraries become busier. Looking at Pennsylvania for example, the number of items lent continues to increase. Since 2000 there has been a 24% increase in the lending of library materials in Pennsylvania from 54 million to 67 million books and other items. Unfortunately, this increased use comes at the very time communities are least able to support their libraries. Many states across the country will be struggling to meet their maintenance of effort requirements to maintain eligibility to receive LSTA funds.

## **Increasing Use**

In states across the nation and in counties across Pennsylvania, the role of the library has emerged as both a destination for resources and a place to engage with the community.

In Pennsylvania, libraries are becoming better and better at identifying and meeting the changing needs of their communities, and are becoming the information and social center of that community. This role is a natural fit for libraries as they open access, expand services, offer targeted programs and invest in technology that is valued by the community—from the youngest to the oldest. The effort shows as more people are

visiting and using libraries than ever before. Nationwide, recent statistics show libraries host more than 1.3 billion visits and circulate more than 2 billion items in each year.

Attendance figures continue to go up in Pennsylvania as well. Last year there were 45 million visits to libraries, including 3.5 million people attending library programs. We are also pleased to note that last year in Pennsylvania half the population aged 18 and over physically visited a library. This does not include those who used the library remotely only.

### **Libraries Contribute to the Economic Community**

An investment in libraries is an investment in the community. In Pennsylvania a study conducted by the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill recently showed that for every dollar invested in the public library, the community receives a return on investment of \$5.50. Studies in other states across the country have shown similar results.

Not only is there an economic return on investment to citizens and organization users, the surrounding communities receive an economic return in ripple effects from salaries and wages paid to staff, library purchases made, and a halo effect from spending in the nearby community by visitors during their trips to the public libraries.

### **The Significance of LSTA Funds**

In addition to state and local funding, libraries would not be able to have the enormous social impact on their communities without the Library Service and Technology Act (LSTA). LSTA is the only federal program exclusively for libraries, and it is administered by the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS).

LSTA expands services for learning and access to information resources in all types of libraries for people of all ages. Pennsylvania, for example, uses LSTA funds to support their summer reading program in which more than 280,000 children and teens participated—the largest number to date. More Pennsylvania students participated in the summer reading program than played Little League!

Other significant uses of LSTA funds in Pennsylvania include grants to libraries to develop innovative services including state of the art electronic networks, training programs for school, academic and public librarians and for library trustees. A School Librarian Toolkit was developed to align the school library resources and services with Pennsylvania's academic standards. LSTA also made possible the POWER Library online databases, the *One Book Every One Child* program, and collection development grants for public and school libraries.



## **The Contribution of our School Libraries to Student Achievement**

At the same time public libraries provide many essential services to their communities, school libraries have become the cornerstone of the school. School libraries are no longer just for books. Instead, they have become sophisticated 21<sup>st</sup> century learning environments offering a full range of print and electronic resources that provide equal learning opportunities to all students, regardless of the socio-economic or education levels of the community.

Across the United States, numerous studies have shown that students in schools with strong school libraries learn more, get better grades, and score higher on standardized tests than their peers in schools without libraries. A recent study showed that Pennsylvania middle schools with the best PSSA reading scores spend twice as much on their school libraries as the lowest scoring schools.

The skills needed to function successfully in a 21<sup>st</sup> Century global workforce have gone beyond reading. Business leaders are concerned that too many workers are entering the workforce without information literacy skills – those skills needed to find, retrieve, analyze and use information. These are the skills that equip workers with the ability to think critically and work proficiently. Who better to teach information literacy than librarians, the information experts?

Some of the major skills that school library media specialists teach are the techniques and methods for locating and answering curriculum needs through critical thinking. Using the library's many and varied resources, school librarians also teach students how to work collaboratively, which, combined with the information literacy skills, is ideal for ensuring college readiness and success in the workforce.

### **In Closing**

Thank you again for this opportunity to share with you the traditional and emerging roles of our libraries and their dedication in meeting the needs of our communities nationwide. I report to you with confidence, the funding invested in public libraries is a wise and fruitful investment as all aspects of the community benefit. Libraries support the development and care of young children and families, support formal education and strengthen local economies. Libraries add richness and quality to the life of adults and seniors and special populations. There is so much more libraries do for our communities that cannot be quantified in data or studies. Libraries satisfy the curiosities of the lifelong learner throughout life - and as we can all testify, learning begins at the library.

An investment in libraries is an investment in communities.