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March 9, 2021

**TO: The Honorable State Representatives and Senators of the Appropriations
Subcommittee for Elementary and Secondary Education**

RE: Governor's HB-6439 and the State Library Budget

My name is Beth Crowley and I am the Director of the Cheshire Public Library and the Co-Chair of the Connecticut Library Association's Legislative Committee. I am submitting testimony in opposition to the Governor's proposed cuts to the Connecticut State Library Budget.

The Connecticut library community has come before you in the past with the concern that if cut too deeply, the Connecticut State Library would be in jeopardy of losing crucial federal funding. I am here today to say, with these proposed cuts, that time has come. If the State Library Budget is approved as recommended it will mean a loss of \$97,000 in federal funding for our State.

One of the most concerning cuts is the \$100,000 reduction to the BorrowIt line, previously known as Connecticard payments. BorrowIt is a program that allows any resident in Connecticut with a valid library card from their hometown to borrow materials at any other library in Connecticut free of charge. Town libraries are then directly provided a stipend from the BorrowIt program in exchange for serving non-residents.

BorrowIt has been in place for 48 years and is one of the best examples of successful regionalization that Connecticut has. In FY2020, over \$52 million dollars of library materials were borrowed through this program at a cost to the State of only a little over \$700,000 – an incredible return on investment!

But this program only works if the funding remains high enough to offset the cost to towns to provide this service. Currently, due to continued reductions in the BorrowIt line, libraries are only reimbursed about 20% of the actual cost per transaction leaving municipalities to fund the remaining 80%. Any further reductions to BorrowIt will decrease incentives for towns to participate, leading communities to pull up drawbridges to non-residents at a time when serving all patrons has become more important than ever.

Last spring, the Governor demonstrated how it was important for libraries to reopen and to continue to serve non-resident patrons during the pandemic. He chose not to suspend the statutory requirement for libraries to serve non-residents despite our concerns about exceeding capacity limits especially if neighboring libraries had to remain closed. To now cut the BorrowIt funding while libraries continue to serve non-residents under these difficult circumstances is unacceptable.

By prioritizing libraries in the second phase of the Reopening Connecticut process, and by generously providing grant funding to assist rural and urban libraries to reopen, the Governor has sent a clear message that he values the services libraries provide particularly during times of crisis. For this we are thankful.

However, since 2009 the Connecticut State Library has lost 32% of its funding. These cuts have undermined important services such as the intrastate materials delivery system, the Connecticut Library Consortium and important databases our state university systems depend on to educate our next generation of workers including nurses, teachers and business entrepreneurs. Further cuts will continue to erode these services in a State that is already at an embarrassingly 41st in aid to its libraries. This is a very different message than the one Governor Lamont sent earlier this year.

I was honored to be part of the selection team for the new State Librarian. There are many challenges our libraries face as we prepare for the future of library service, a future we may have already glimpsed during the pandemic. I have every confidence that Deborah Schander is up for this challenge however she needs a budget that doesn't get libraries just through today, but helps prepare all Connecticut libraries for what is to come.

Please support the request of our new State Librarian and do not approve the recommended cuts in HB-6439. In doing so, you will not only be preserving the budget of the State Library and its necessary federal funding but you will be making a positive impact on all libraries, in every town in Connecticut.



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