

March 2, 2021

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for the Connecticut Library Association

**RE: HB-6439**

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of the State Library budget and voice my opposition to the Governor's proposed reductions.

After more than a decade cuts, any cut to the State library budget is now also a cut to Federal dollars. The proposed cuts totaling \$200,000 will lead to an additional \$97,000 cut in Federal Maintenance of Effort (MOE). A cut of \$297,000 will further damage vital programs and services of the State Library. This would force the State Library to find additional savings, further eroding the State Library's ability to meet the needs of Connecticut's citizens.

Governor Lamont cuts this Connecticut State Library budget line 15% with a \$100,000 cut. The borrowIT CT program, created in 1976, is enormously popular and enables ALL Connecticut residents to freely borrow materials from other libraries at no extra cost. This program supports equity and regionalization and saves money for communities. At an estimated value of \$52,000,000 for the borrowed materials and a cost of \$700,000, borrowIT CT has tremendous return on investment. The program has long been underfunded, now providing only \$0.20 per item loaned, although the estimated cost to libraries to lend is \$1.05 per item. Once funded at over \$1 million, the program has been whittled to 57% of the 2008 appropriation. Reducing funding decreases incentives for towns to participate, leading communities to pull up drawbridges to non-residents.

Connecticut residents continued to make use of the program once most public libraries re-opened in the summer of 2020. With 37% of the state's public libraries still closed to residents, Connecticut's citizens are visiting other libraries to check out materials, use public computers, and to study. Due to COVID closures and limited services at other libraries, many public libraries are undertaking more use by nonresidents than ever before. For example, Manchester has seen a six percent increase in loans to nonresident borrowers since reopening in June 2020.

Restore \$100,000 to Connecticut's borrowIT CT program.

The Connecticut State Library has lost 31% of its funding over the past decade as cuts and accumulating rescissions have eliminated staff and services of the agency. Those cuts undermine services and resources for the public, particularly students from Kindergarten to graduate school. Rescissions seem like the painless way to reduce the budget, but over time their damage is real and lasting. Libraries of all kinds will either take on additional, unanticipated costs or reduce or eliminate services.

My organization and member libraries support the State Library and the leadership and support it provides so that each library may support its community. Thank you.

