

March 8, 2021

TO: Elementary and Secondary Education Subcommittee for Appropriations

RE: HB-6439

Dear Sen. McCrory, Rep. Felipe and the entire Appropriations Committee:

I write today in opposition to the Governor's proposed cuts to the budget of Connecticut State Library. I do not envy your position, as you listen to residents and carefully consider the good that can be done with state funding in various areas of education, while also safeguarding Connecticut's long term fiscal health. Some budget cuts are inevitably necessary, but cuts have consequences, and several of those cuts proposed for the State Library would create severe consequences.

A 15% cut (\$100,000) to the borrowIT reimbursement grant would impact almost every public library in the state. Last year, 163 public libraries received borrowIT grants, Avon Free Public Library included. In Avon, borrowIT funding last year provided money for PPE and other Covid related supplies, programming costs, and extra book purchases for our library. These grants also provide incentive to ensure that public libraries, which are largely funded with local municipal money, offer reciprocal service to members of neighboring communities. Such regional service is always helpful, but became crucial during the pandemic as libraries adopted different service models and hours. As of this date, 37% of Connecticut's public libraries are still closed.

Without a financial incentive to share materials with non-residents, some libraries could drop out of the borrowIT program, leading to less access to books and other materials for some residents. This lack of reciprocal borrowing in turn costs more for either the individual borrower (who needs to buy the book, wait longer for a copy, or travel further to retrieve it) or to their hometown library, which then needs to purchase more titles to fulfill their resident's needs. borrowIT is a shining example of regionalism, and one that should be rewarded, not cut.

Along with a \$100,000 cut to borrowIT, Gov. Lamont's proposed budget shaves almost another \$100,000 from the State Library's already paper thin budget. (The State Library has lost 31% of its budget over the past 10 years!) This cut will trigger the federal Maintenance of Effort statute, meaning an additional loss of approximately \$97,000 in federal dollars from the Institute of Museum and Library Services.

Such a cut, totaling almost \$300,000 or more than 3% of the State Library's budget, could be crippling to other valuable statewide programs like researchIT (a suite of online databases available to all Connecticut residents via the State Library), continuing education and training programs for librarians, grant writing and strategic planning assistance, eGO (the State Library's new e-book app), and so many other important State Library-led initiatives.

Libraries are a social safety net, a bridge across the digital divide, an incubator of literacy, and a crucial part of our democratic society. Please consider restoring the cuts proposed to the biennial budget for the Connecticut State Library.

Respectfully submitted,

Glenn Grube, Director, Avon Free Public Library