

Salutations to the Appropriations Committee,

I am Samantha Lee, resident of Tolland and Head of Reference Services at the Enfield Public Library. I also serve as the Intellectual Freedom Committee Chair for the CT Library Association.

I am submitting this testimony to oppose Governor Lamont's proposed 2022-2023 budget for the Connecticut State Library and Cooperating Library Services Unit.

The State Library receives Federal money from the Institute of Museum & Library Services. The governor's proposed cuts of \$200,000 would trigger the Federal Maintenance of Effort (MOE) statute and the State Library stands to lose an additional \$97,000 in Federal funds. The loss of \$297,000 would erode the State Library's ability to meet the needs of CT residents.

Gov. Lamont's cuts threatens the popular borrowIT CT program. This program supports CT libraries' regionalization, mutual support, and equity efforts. The program's estimated value of \$52,000,000 is a tremendous return of \$700,000 (cost from 2020-2021 budget). The trend of underfunding needs to stop as it would dis-incentivize town libraries from participating – hurting vulnerable communities and stymying the exchange of ideas. Gov. Lamont prioritized libraries for reopening in Phase 2 and mandated that public libraries maintain the ability to serve non-residents—that ability depends on borrowIT remaining viable.

The State Library has bled 31% of its funding over the past decade. And yet it has been expected to maintain resources with the reduced budget. It has hurt public and school libraries. Libraries have been routinely expected to take on additional costs or reduce services.

The Connecticut Library Consortium (under Cooperating Library Service Units) has seen 67% of its budget cut over the last 12 years. In 2020, CLC saved \$6.4 million in cost saving programs and provides \$50 public service return for every \$1 tax invested. CLC cannot be expected to provide similar services and savings to member libraries with a flat budget even as costs increase elsewhere.

Enfield was one of the 62 recipients of the Everybody Learns Grant that totaled \$2.6 million. It allowed us to create outdoor spaces with picnic tables for patrons to use as meeting spaces when other spaces were closed. We extended our Wi-Fi range to the parking lot for students/work-from-homers while maintaining social distancing at those same picnic tables. We were able to reconfigure our indoor space to accommodate patrons' different needs under a pandemic, including a private study booth. It was a unique opportunity to expand our services - but it was long overdue to stagnant budgets.

As a librarian during COVID, I've helped my patrons navigate wills, medical directives, power of attorneys on the State Library's offering of Legal Reference Center. Because of CLC's negotiating power, I'm able to offer JobNow – a job assistance/career assistance tool - to job seekers recently laid off because of the pandemic. My colleagues have stepped up to offer safe curbside services to patrons needing library resources and materials. They scrambled to open their libraries to patrons needing help filing for unemployment, getting counted in the 2020 Census and needing internet connections to get their schoolwork done. Even now as the vaccine rollout hits Connecticut, my colleagues have been helping patrons get signed up in VAMS and getting appointments to the most vulnerable populations. I have watched in awe of libraries and librarians rising to the occasion and filling the need where other services have fallen short.

Innovations in CT libraries have stalled long enough. The budget of the CT State Library and CT Library Association cannot be cut if libraries are to innovate; and provide accurate information and resources to a public during a pandemic. To gut the State Library budget as Gov. Lamont wants for 2022-2023 is to ignore the hard work libraries have done in service to this state during the pandemic. It will break the fragile social infrastructure and push the vulnerable over the edge.

With Respect,

Samantha Lee, MLS  
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Intellectual Freedom Commit, CT Library Association – Chair  
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