



ESSEX LIBRARY
ASSOCIATION

A Member Supported Not for Profit Organization

March 9, 2021

Testimony from Deborah Smith, Executive Director
Essex Library Association
33 West Avenue, Essex, CT 06426

Re: HB-06439

Dear Education Appropriations Committee,

Thank you for this opportunity to testify regarding the Governor's Proposed FY2022-23 Budget for Elementary & Secondary Education Agencies.

My name is Deborah Smith and I am the Executive Director of Essex Library Association in Essex, Connecticut. I am here to speak in support of the **State Library's BorrowIT program and the Connecticut Library Consortium (CLC)**. I strongly oppose proposed cuts to their budgets for 2022-23.

Essex Library is an association library, a non-profit organization offering services for the public benefit. We are our community's center for lifelong learning, serving 6,500 residents in the villages of Centerbrook, Ivoryton, Essex and across the state. During this challenging year we have been creative in supporting our community. We increased our digital holdings, held two collection drives for our local food pantry, and provided notary services when our town service was closed due to the pandemic. We provided information to residents on how to register to vote. This year we also assumed the cost of providing free printed state tax forms to assist taxpayers in exercising their civic responsibility.

When I arrived at my library this morning, one of the first things I did was check our **BorrowIT** delivery bin for incoming library materials destined for Essex patrons. BorrowIt is a key interlibrary loan service that enables Essex Library to transfer books and materials across the state. The program is environmentally friendly and cost-effective for our library. The program also equalizes discrepancies in individual and institutional access to resources and information.

As a member of the State Library's Digital Inclusion Task Force, I am increasingly aware that a large number of our state's residents have neither a device to connect to the internet or reliable and affordable internet access. There is no doubt such access is crucial. But even as we look to a digitally connected future for all, there remains a need for materials in physical formats. Through BorrowIt's centralized transfer among libraries, we can provide physical items held elsewhere to our patrons while saving them the hassles and costs of travel, saving the state wear and tear on our roadways, and saving our environment on increased carbon emissions. The program also allows libraries to reduce redundant physical items across collections and direct current and future purchases toward accessible e-formats, all while conserving valuable taxpayer dollars and staff resources.

Last fall, the United Way of Middlesex County reported that the percentage of households struggling as employed but asset limited and income constrained in Essex grew by eight percent in the past two years. Essex Library is focused on raising awareness about income inequality, as it has negative impacts not just for individuals and households but also for businesses and organizations. Next week, I will host a book discussion for our patrons of an influential work on American poverty and income inequality. This seminal title in American history, published more than fifty years ago, is available only in print. Just 21 libraries in the state, many of them college or university libraries, own a copy of the work. Even in this digital age, there are no e-book or e-audio options for this title. BorrowIt has been crucial to our ability to include this title of relevant historic and intellectual value in our discussion series.

CLC is a state legislative program and cooperating library service unit funded by the Connecticut State Library. Essex Library and our patrons benefit daily from the competitive bidding on databases and services obtained through CLC. During this pandemic year, we were able to obtain discounts on required Personal Protective Equipment such as sneeze guards, stanchions, and decals and signage through CLC's competitive vendor discount service. This year has seen high unemployment and under employment throughout the state. We were able to enhance our job search and benefit services through CLC's e-resource contracts for the Brainfuse JobNow, Data Axle Reference Solutions, and LearningExpress Job & Career Accelerator databases. Our town has a higher-than-average representation of military veterans, residents who have faithfully served our country. This year CLC allowed us to offer a new resource, VetNow, which helps veterans navigate Veterans Affairs benefits and assists them in transitioning to civilian life. I know of no other organization in the state offering these resources at a discount to libraries. The failure to adequately fund CLC next year could have an adverse impact on our ability to continue to benefit from these competitively priced contracts that provide services of value to our town's residents.

CLC and the State Library have also provided valuable resources to librarians. As a new director, CLC's regular roundtable discussions have supported and connected me with peers across the state. My staff also regularly benefit from webinars, conferences, and discussions that enhance our skills. This year, these services helped our staff develop and stay current with best practices for operational safety during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Librarians are a resourceful bunch, and it might be tempting to think that, of all professionals in the state, we are most likely to find ingenious ways to continue services and programs. But resourcefulness has its limits, more so in a year when libraries have been hit with higher operational costs due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Libraries are a cornerstone of lifelong education; we serve 'pupils' of all ages, backgrounds and aptitudes for the duration of their lives. I urge you to partner with us by fully funding the State Library's BorrowIt program and the Connecticut Library Consortium in this and future budgets.

Sincerely,

Deborah Smith
Executive Director