

March 9, 2021

Testimony concerning HB-6439: Proposed Cuts to the CT State Library Budget

To the Appropriations Committee:

I am submitting written testimony against the proposed cuts to the CT State Library budget. As a librarian who works in a diverse and economically strained community (West Haven, CT), I have seen firsthand the benefits of the borrowIT CT program for our residents. No library has everything people want or need so it is an amazing service to be able to get materials to people without consideration of cost. The borrowIT CT program is perhaps the most widely known benefit of a CT library card. 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 for the state. 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 physically 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 non-residents than ever before. Please restore the \$100,000 to the borrowIT budget.

To further emphasize the importance of the fund restoration, please consider that any cuts to the current State Library budget will now have consequences for our receipt of federal money from the IMLS (Institute for Museum and Library Services). The Governor's proposed cuts to the State Library would trigger the Federal Maintenance of Effort (MOE) statute, leading to a loss of \$97,000 in Federal funds for Connecticut. This additional cut would force the State Library to find additional savings, further eroding the State Library's ability to meet the needs of Connecticut's citizens. Please don't let the state's libraries lose out on this essential funding.

This past fall, the West Haven Library was very fortunate to receive one of the Governor's Connectivity Grants. It helped us improve our services and our building facilities to better serve the community during the Covid pandemic. We opened last July to the public, and, buoyed by the grant, have been open continuously to serve West Haven residents and anyone else who walks through our doors. Without proper support for the State Library, the state's many public libraries will be hard pressed to maintain our mission of equitable access for all CT residents. Please don't make further cuts to the budget. Help us keep our promise to our communities.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Maria Zervos

Head of Children's/Teen Librarian, The West Haven Public Library (West Haven, CT)