May 10, 2017

The Honorable Kevin McCarty, Chair
Budget Subcommittee Number 2 on Education Finance
California State Assembly
State Capitol, Room 2136
Sacramento, California 95814

RE: Member Request – State Library Budget Issues
Budget Item # 6120-215-0001: Statewide Library Broadband Services
Budget Item # 6120-213-0001: Career Online High School
State Library Hearing Date: May 9, 2017

Dear Assemblymember McCarty,

We write to respectfully request your consideration of a Budget request, which would seek to use available “one time funds” for the purpose of funding two important programs within the State Library department – the Statewide Library Broadband Services and Career Online High School. The State Library budget is scheduled for hearing in your Budget Subcommittee on May 9, 2017.

Budget Item # 6120-215-0001 – Statewide Library Broadband Services

We are requesting that your Budget Subcommittee consider an augmentation of $4 million to the Statewide Library Broadband Services program for the purpose of continuing the successful effort of connecting public libraries throughout the state to a high-speed, broadband “backbone” operated by the Corporation for Education Network Initiatives in California (CENIC). As you are aware, this major project was launched by Governor Brown in his 2014-15 Budget, in recognition of the need to assist public libraries with their inadequate broadband capacity and significant connectivity challenges.

In 2014-15, the Governor provided $2.25 million in funding for the public libraries to join the CENIC backbone (CSU, UC, K-12, etc. all pay a fee to join CENIC). That year he also provided $1 million in connection grants, which was subsequently approved by the legislature. In 2015-16, thanks to an effort by then-Assemblymember Mike Gatto and a bipartisan coalition of legislators, $4 million was provided for connection grants for library jurisdictions and some branches. The $1 million and the $4 million were “one time” spending appropriations, as the Governor and the legislature have believed that “one time” funds are very appropriate for the connection grants.

The State Library has indicated that by June 30, 2018, 143 library jurisdictions (e.g. the main headquarters) and 275 branches will be connected by June 30, 2017. Now in Year Three of the phase-in, the State Library estimates that 17 new library jurisdictions will participate in the broadband project and 22 jurisdictions will be in need of adding additional branches. Additionally, we have some jurisdictions that are deemed “hard to connect,” in either rural or urban settings, due to infrastructure and site challenges. Portions of the $4 million in “one time” funds that I am requesting could go to support the connection of these libraries in challenged areas, potentially including areas in my own Yolo County.

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The benefits of the Broadband Project for libraries have been substantial, as it has brought markedly increased broadband speed to public libraries, more reliable service, and significantly decreased monthly bills because of the ability to maximize federal eRate and California Teleconnect Fund discounts. (Maximizing the eRate and CTF discounts has been a service that CENIC has offered to the libraries, as part of their CENIC’S Administrative arm.)

Budget Item 6120-213-0001 – Career Online High School

In addition to the broadband funding, I am requesting the subcommittee give consideration to $1 million in funding for the successful and empowering program known as “Career Online High School.” This program, a partnership with public libraries and Gale, a company with a 60-year history of supporting public library resources and maximizing learning opportunities at public libraries, has a very successful track record of facilitating individuals with the tools to earn their high school diploma on line using public library facilities.

Since the beginning of the “Career Online High School” pilot project, begun in December, 2015, 44 library jurisdictions have facilitated 178 graduates receiving high school diplomas, with an 89% student retention rate. Over 970 scholarships have been awarded and projections for June, 2018 are that the graduate number will have increased to over 1300 graduates and the total scholarships awarded will increase to 1600. In the fifteen months since the beginning of the pilot project, Career Online High School has demonstrated a very impressive success rate and justifies a further investment of the modest amount requested to support the furtherance and expansion of this successful program.

It is important to note in considering this request, that approximately 20% of Californians over the age of 25 lack a high school diploma and that California ranks 48th nationally among the states in this category. We must do better, and “Career Online High School” addresses the population most in need and has demonstrated a success rate while requiring only very modest funding to be successful. According to the State Library, the lifetime benefit to taxpayers for each high school diploma earned is $61,617 (Benner, et. al., Cost of dropouts in the Capital region).

Finally, we believe that there is a perfect synergy between these two programs, as the Career Online High School program is reliant on high speed broadband in order to make the education experience available to the enrollees. I hope that you and the subcommittee members will give respectful consideration to this modest “Budget ask” on behalf of California’s public libraries and the 22 million patrons that use them.

Sincerely,

Chairman Kevin McCarty
May 10, 2017
cc: Assembly Budget Subcommittee Number 2 on Education Finance, members
Mark Martin, Committee Consultant
Amy Rutschow, Assembly Republican Consultant
Assemblymember Phil Ting, Chair, Assembly Budget Committee
Assemblymember Jay Olberholte, Vice Chair, Assembly Budget Committee