State Funding Increase for Libraries Needed Now, Not Later

Request:
The Pennsylvania Library Association is asking the General Assembly for an increase of $1.94 million to the public library subsidy line in the 2017-2018 Pennsylvania budget. This would take total state funding for public libraries to $56.41 million - a 3.56% increase over the current funding.

Justification:
• Pennsylvania public libraries receive the same amount of state aid as they did in 2010. The current $54.47 million public library subsidy is the result of a $21 million (32%) cut in 2006. Meanwhile, inflation has reached almost 10% since 2010.
• Libraries directly connect with our citizens – including hours beyond the regular business day – helping them access key government resources such as referrals to local resources for battling the opioid crisis, workforce development online curricula for career building, business tools for employers, STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Math) programming and kits for school-age programming, significant early education learning for a majority of our population, and vital computer and internet access.
• We know that in the face of state departmental cuts and consolidations, public libraries, when properly funded, will be the key to filling the needs of our citizens in a cost-effective way. A recent example of this was when the PA Department of Health, one of our PA Forward partners, asked us to assist them with their “Stopping the Flu Starts with You” Campaign. The department needed ways to connect residents with resources and information in their home communities. Through our efforts, we identified more than 40 libraries willing to provide space, event organization and staff time to assist the department in getting this very important message out to the our most treasured resources – residents throughout Pennsylvania.
• In addition to the physical resources in the building, and 24/7 accessibility to electronic resources, libraries offer the human connection from professional, credentialed librarians and staff that assist all patrons. In a day and age where the internet is abuzz with discussions of what is fake versus credible news, our librarians are there, assisting their users with locating reliable, accurate information so they are making informed decisions that may have a long-term impact on their lives.
• Libraries have already made staff cuts since the funding cuts of 2006, put off repairs, and stretched every dollar in their lean budgets. The need for an increase in library funding is NOW, not later.

Pennsylvania Library Association Fast Facts – Public Libraries:
• There are 456 public libraries with 629 outlets that receive state aid.
• State aid requires minimum standards of open hours, professional librarians who meet rigorous credentialing standards, and significant local investment.
• Approximately 85% of public libraries in PA are 501(c)(3) organizations that rely on the combination of state and local funding, donations, and fundraising for operational budgets.
• Libraries offer services to library card holders 24/7 through digital content including eBooks, audiobooks, and databases. In the latest data from 2014, there were more than 5.29 million registered library users, and more than 66.14 million items circulated in Pennsylvania public libraries.