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FY 2018 Written Testimony for the Record

U.S. House Committee on Appropriations

Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies

Subject: Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) Funding

Dear Chairman Cole, Ranking Member DeLauro, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify about the importance of federal Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) funding to Oklahomans and their libraries. The Oklahoma Department of Libraries (ODL) received \$2,073,540 in LSTA funds during FFY 2016.

The federal library program has changed much since the initial Library Services Act of 1956, but it has always encouraged a strong federal/state partnership to improve library and information services for Americans. While LSTA rules and regulations provide broad, aspirational goals for libraries, the flexibility of the program lets individual states like Oklahoma focus on the practical methods and services to improve and add value to local library services based on local needs.

What follows are some recent examples of how Oklahoma has used LSTA dollars to make a difference in the lives of Oklahomans. In addition to statewide results, statistics from an individual House District (Chairman Cole's home district, Oklahoma Congressional District 4) are also offered where available, in an effort to add some context to the numbers. You will also see some quotes from the field about the importance of these services.

Statewide Services are projects that are especially beneficial to our smallest public and school libraries. The median annual local budget of Oklahoma public libraries serving less than 10,000 population is \$48,500. (In District 4, the median local budget of libraries this size is \$59,728.)

After salaries, utilities, and other fixed costs, smaller public libraries struggle to afford the

materials and services their community needs. School budget problems in the state mean many school libraries have very little to no budgets to require materials.

• **Statewide Reference Databases:** ODL uses LSTA dollars to purchase statewide access to a powerful suite of online reference resources for all public, school, and academic libraries. The resources include top databases on business, health, and education like Business Source, Small Business Reference Center, Regional Business News, Medline, Health Source, and ERIC. Millions of full-text articles are available from magazines, newspapers, and peer-reviewed journals. Oklahoma’s small schools and public libraries could never hope to afford a subscription to these databases, and even if they could, it would cost millions in local tax dollars. The statewide license to these resources is one of the most efficient uses of LSTA funds.

— **Results:** In FY2016, Oklahomans performed more than 50 million information searches on these databases. District 4 residents conducted more than 10 million of those searches.

— **Quotes from public and school librarians:** “Many people who use our resources are looking for jobs, creating resumes, etc. The business resources are used a lot.” • “My library depends on and utilizes this program on a daily basis to deliver information to our patrons.” • “Knowing how to access a database is a state-mandated learning objective, and our library cannot afford to purchase this product on our own.”

• **Homework Help:** ODL also uses federal funds to purchase *Britannica School* Elementary and Middle School reference resources for all public and school libraries. These age-appropriate resources are valuable to teachers, who have access to special lesson plans and other instructional ideas, and individual students who can access the most recent and accurate encyclopedia entries on a host of subjects.

— **Results:** In FY2016, Oklahoma’s young people sat down to use *Britannica School* encyclopedia almost 500,000 times. District 4 children and teens accessed more than 146,000 encyclopedia entries.

— **Quotes from school librarians:** “Britannica gives us updated information for students to do research papers, since there is little funding for us to buy reference materials.” • “As much as their teachers and I tell them otherwise, if (students) find it on the Internet, (they think) it must be true! When I direct them to (these) resources, I know my students are getting good information.” • “I can’t afford to buy encyclopedias anymore, so these databases are especially wonderful.”

• **Summer Reading Program:** Students who read for pleasure during the summer months are more likely to maintain, or even improve, their grade-level reading skills. Since 1969, ODL has used federal funds to provide materials and program ideas to help local libraries host Summer Reading Programs. In the new century, Oklahoma has joined with all other states in a Summer Reading consortium to provide a quality program and save money at the same time.

— **Results:** More than 98,000 Oklahoma children, teens, and pre-schoolers enrolled in their summer program. More than 26,000 of the participants were in District 4.

— **Feedback from librarians:** 81% of public libraries agree/strongly agree that ODL provides the support needed to conduct an effective summer reading program. • “ODL is doing a great job in this area. I hope it continues to have the funds to continue this program.” • “A great big THANK YOU to all of the ODL staff that support summer reading. We couldn't do it without the support.”

• **Oklahoma Virtual Library (OKVL)** is a statewide consortium of libraries that brings e-books, audio books, and other digital content to communities that could never afford these resources on

their own. Libraries that serve fewer than 100,000 people may join the consortium for a low annual fee. While each library purchases titles, their patrons have access to all of the content available through this shared resource. ODL provides an annual grant to the consortium to purchase even more titles.

- **Results:** More than 1.2 million digital items were checked out from the OKVL during the last 24 months. Eighty libraries participate in the consortium, including 12 public libraries and library systems in District 4.
- **Quotes from OKVL users:** “Having a newborn makes it hard to get out of the house. I love using this service instead now!” • “I have arthritis, so it’s hard to hold a book, but with my eReader I can read or listen as often as I want.” • “I can’t see well, and this allows me to read.” • “I don’t live in town, so it’s more convenient to get them online.”

• **Interlibrary Loan** is a statewide service that brings library resources directly to Oklahomans, no matter where they live in the state. More than 67,000 items were loaned to or borrowed from Oklahoma libraries to fulfill the information needs of citizens last year.

Beyond traditional statewide services, ODL offers **Continuing Education and Training Opportunities** for public and tribal library staff.

• **Public Librarian Certification:** Only 20% of Oklahoma library staff have formal training the field, so ODL offers a voluntary certification program. Free classes are offered to teach the basics of the profession.

- **Results:** The success of the certification program belies its voluntary nature, as individual Oklahoma library staff members have shown a real desire to master their role of information provider in their community. Attendance at classes in FFY2016

numbered 215, with 31 of them from District 4. Of the 591 actively certified librarians in the state, 116 hail from District 4.

Finally, ODL uses LSTA funds to offer **Grant Opportunities** to libraries and literacy councils to initiate new projects, or meet the needs of special populations. Recent examples include **Health Literacy Grants** to host community programs on health and wellness; **Network Assessment Grants** to help public libraries improve their broadband speeds; **Library Technology Grants** to provide computers and other equipment to small libraries; **Digitization Grants** to provide training and scanning services to preserve important collection items in 16 libraries and museums; and **STEM Grants** to bring science and technology programs to young people in libraries across their state.

The Oklahoma economy on both the state and local levels has suffered since 2008. Oklahomans have seen their local schools and municipal services decline. LSTA funds have been the safety net for learning and quality of life in Oklahoma communities. Thank you for these desperately needed resources.