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ALA welcomes eighth consecutive budget increase for IMLS in FY21 federal appropriations

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Libraries bypassed for emergency funding in omnibus spending package

WASHINGTON, D.C. – The American Library Association (ALA) welcomed the eighth consecutive increase in federal fiscal year (FY) appropriations to the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS). The regular FY 2021 budget bill, passed on December 21 alongside the \$900 billion Emergency Covid Relief spending package, includes an additional \$5 million for IMLS, including \$2 million for the Library Services and Technology Act.

ALA President Julius C. Jefferson, Jr., said, “ALA welcomes the \$5 million increase for IMLS in FY2021. Library advocates have overcome four consecutive attempts by the White House to eliminate the agency and have increased funding for IMLS by \$26 million since 2016.”

The Library Services and Technology Act received \$197.5 million of the overall \$257 million IMLS budget, with an increase of \$2 million directed to the Grants to States program. The FY 2021 appropriations bill includes increases for other line items important to libraries (see summary chart Federal Funding for Library Programs 2017-2021

(http://www.ala.org/advocacy/sites/ala.org.advocacy/files/content/Funding%20Chart%202017%20_%202021.xlsx)):

- \$28 million for the Innovative Approaches to Literacy program, an increase of \$1 million, with at least half of this funding dedicated to school libraries
- \$167.5 million in funding for each of the National Endowment for the Humanities and the National Endowment for the Arts, marking a \$5.25 million increase over last year for both agencies
- \$462.8 million for the National Library of Medicine, an increase of \$5.9 million
- \$757.3 million for Library of Congress, an increase of \$32 million
- \$117.0 million for Government Publishing Office, level funding over last year
- \$377.0 million for the National Archives and Records Administration, an \$18 million increase

“All these numbers add up to one truth: library advocacy works. Year-round advocacy yields year-round results,” said Jefferson. “There is an increasing awareness among decisionmakers that libraries are an indispensable strand in a tattered digital safety net. Tens of thousands of advocates, including library

workers, Friends, Trustees and State Librarians, have contacted their federal leaders since March to urge support for library funding.”

“Federal support for libraries is not only a wise investment in times of crisis: sustained funding can build capacity to meet community needs in the long run,” said Jefferson. “At the same time, I won’t hide ALA’s disappointment that there is no direct funding for America’s libraries in the new emergency relief package. ALA stands firmly behind libraries’ need for additional resources. Americans desperately need what libraries have to offer, but waning resources jeopardize it: a broadband internet connection, though limited; hotspots and connected devices, though not enough; and the staffing to ensure their effective use, even though capacity is wearing thin.”

An early framework for the bill introduced by the bipartisan, bicameral Problem Solvers Caucus had slated a nine-digit infusion for IMLS to deliver state grants for broadband funding. Ultimately, legislators chose to provide direct assistance for many of the community members, including emergency benefits to cover the cost of broadband for qualifying low-income households and those that include recently unemployed individuals, with additional benefits for households on Tribal lands.

While the relief package did not include direct emergency funding through IMLS, the bill does provide library-eligible measures, including \$81.9 billion for K-12 schools and higher education. Some of the relief funding was dedicated for Historically Black Colleges and Universities and Minority Serving Institutions to prepare for or respond to the coronavirus. Library advocacy at the state, campus and school district levels is needed to obtain some of this funding, available through September 2022. Congress also expanded of the Paycheck Protection Program to include 501(c)(6) organizations that are tax-exempt, such as library associations. (See Omnibus & COVID-19 Relief Bill Summary (http://www.ala.org/advocacy/sites/ala.org.advocacy/files/content/2020_Omnibus_Summary.pdf))

“Throughout the long weekend, up to the eleventh hour, ALA staff partnered with individual advocates to tell key decisionmakers in Congress to include libraries into the relief package,” said Jefferson. “As a result, members of Congress on both sides of the aisle joined ALA to advocate to Leadership that libraries should be included in this relief package.”

In addition to FY 2021 funding, ALA advocates gained significant ground for libraries throughout 2020:


- \$50 million for broadband in the CARES Act (<https://americanlibrariesmagazine.org/blogs/the-scoop/cares-act-federal-relief-package-supports-libraries/>)
- Introduction of legislation of benefit to libraries:
 - **Stabilization:** Library Stabilization Fund Act (http://www.ala.org/advocacy/sites/ala.org.advocacy/files/content/libfunding/LSFA_Summary_Final.pdf) (July 2020) and the Build America’s Libraries Act (<http://www.ala.org/news/member-news/2020/12/ala-welcomes-build-americas-libraries-act>) (December 2020)
 - Broadband (<https://americanlibrariesmagazine.org/blogs/the-scoop/latest-broadband-bills/>): HOTSPOTS Act and the Moving Forward Act (July 2020) and the ACCESS the Internet Act (August 2020)
 - Digital Equity: HEROES Act (May 2020) and the Accessible, Affordable Internet for All Act (June 2020)

- School libraries: Save Education Jobs Act (<https://hayes.house.gov/media/press-releases/hayes-introduces-legislation-save-nearly-4-million-education-jobs-spur-economic>) (October 2020)

- Confirmation (<http://www.ala.org/news/member-news/2020/01/us-senate-confirms-ala-member-crosby-kemper-iii-new-imls-director>) of Crosby Kemper III, former executive director of Kansas City Public Library, as director of the Institute of Museum and Library Services

"This incredible momentum will resume into the next year as we continue the push for recovery funding for libraries," said Jefferson. "ALA has already begun to engage with the 117th Congress to ensure the current political favor translates into direct support for library workers and library stabilization as America continues to recover from the pandemic.

"This is a time to take a deep breath, be proud of our hard work and grateful for our wins this year. We'll need energy to build upon our gains in the new Congress."

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