

Maine State Library
Testimony – James Ritter, State Librarian

130th Maine Legislature
Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs
Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

LD 221 – An Act Making Unified Appropriations and Allocations for the Expenditures of State Government, General Fund and Other Funds, and Changing Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government for the Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 2021, June 30, 2022 and June 30, 2023

February 23, 2021

Senator Breen, Representative Pierce, members of the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs; Senator Daughtry, Representative Brennan, members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs, my name is Jamie Ritter, and I am the Maine State Librarian. I am speaking in support of the Maine State Library’s items in the Biennial Budget.

Introduction

Established in 1837, the Maine State Library is one of the first cultural agencies created by state government, and throughout our long history, we have had the privilege and honor of Helping People; Making Maine Libraries Stronger; and Transforming Information into Knowledge (our mission). In 2020, we were challenged, yet we held true to our mission and core values, and we provided leadership through adversity to ensure that our core services continued. We look forward to continuing to serve the people of Maine, and the allocations represented in the proposed FY22-23 budget will allow us to do so.

The Maine State Library is made up of three primary departments, which are Collection Development and Digital Initiatives; Public and Outreach Services – Research and Innovation; and Library Development.

The budget submitted will enable these core departments to carry out their important work. The testimony that follows will underscore the importance of our work and highlight challenges that are before us.

Administration: Page A-388 (Original Part A Budget Submission)

This fund (General Fund) is created to support the role of the Maine State Librarian and associated administrative costs such as technology, central service center, and other administrative responsibilities. The State Librarian is statutorily responsible for overseeing the operation of the Maine State Library, which includes the three primary departments previously referenced. Additionally, the Maine State Library is one of four key agencies that partner to deliver the Maine School and Library Network (MSLN), which delivers high-speed fiber broadband to nearly 900 schools and libraries across Maine.

Blind and Visually Impaired News Access Fund: Page A-389 (Original Part A Budget Submission)

This newly established fund (Special Revenue Fund) receives its revenue from the Maine Public Utilities Commission's portion of the Universal Services Fund. The Maine State Library then administers content subscriptions, most notably Newsline provided by the National Federation for the Blind, to ensure that those Maine citizens who are blind or have visual impairments, can access news services 24/7.

Maine Public Library Fund: Page A-389 (Original Part A Budget Submission)

This fund (Special Revenue Fund), established in 2014, allows Maine-State tax filers to voluntarily contribute to the Maine Public Library Fund when they file their annual state taxes. In 2014, about \$25,000 was collected, however, now over \$50,000 is collected annually through these incredible voluntary contributions. The funds are used to directly support Maine's public libraries through grants that range from \$250-\$5,000. The grants allow libraries to develop innovative community programs, build collections, pilot innovative initiatives, support professional development for librarians, and much more. Since 2014, approximately \$300,000 has been granted to Maine's public libraries.



Example of Maine Public Library Fund (MPLF) grant:

Comment from parent whose son participated in a Skowhegan Public Library MPLF grant program (Robotics Club):

“This fall my son Emmett had the pleasure of participating in the first ever robotics program offered at the Skowhegan Public Library. We were beyond thankful and happy to have such a program offered in our community as the school currently does not provide this. Emmett's interest and skill set increased with each passing week. Instruction and expose to transformative technology in our rural area is so important to preparing our children for the future. Beyond the technology skills gain, Emmett also gained confidence, communication skills, in particular social skills with peer collaboration and problem solving. We are excited and thankful to have Emmett continue participating in future robotics programming offered at the library.”

Maine State Library Fund: Page A-390 (Original Part A Budget Submission)

This is the Maine State Library’s primary operating fund (General Fund and Federal Fund) account that supports the bulk of services delivered by the Maine State Library.

The State Library’s three core departments are represented through this program.

Collections and Digital Initiatives is responsible for all collection development activities and an extensive digitization effort, including a third round of grant funding to digitize newspapers. We have over 7 million miles of books on shelves! Many of these are Maine based, focusing on Maine history, state government publications, books by Maine authors, and a robust non-fiction and genealogy collection. In fact, we boast the largest collection of genealogical materials north of Boston. We collect all Maine newspapers that are in print and have over 20,000 roles of microfilm for many of Maine’s newspapers (past and present).

This department is also primarily responsible for building digital collections and helping to maintain access to the state library’s digital platforms.

The State Library’s Public and Outreach Services department serves Maine citizens through a public/circulating library. We are open 50 hours per week, and in a traditional year can see between 75,000-90,000 visitors at the Maine State Library. We are truly a destination for people all over the state and the nation.

The primary purpose of our public operation is to provide services to Maine citizens seeking to access our collections, desiring research and reference services, public computing support, and attending a special program open to the public. In June we began “curbside” pick-up, which allows our library users to request materials from our collection and pick them up outside our door.

A very important component to our public services is under the auspice of “Outreach Services.” This includes two very special programs – Talking Books/Books for the Blind and Books by Mail programs. The former (Talking Books), lends audio books provided by the National Library Service via the Library of Congress to thousands of eligible Maine Citizens. The Books by Mail program literally mails books to citizens that are homebound and/or in communities that do not have a public library.

Our Library Development department receives its primary funding directly from the Institute of Museum and Library Services through the Library Services and Technology Act’s *Grants to States* program, which is the only federal program exclusive to state library agencies across the nation (MSL receives approx. \$1.3 million annually). The department is made up of a team of Specialists in key areas (i.e. Technology, STEM, Youth Literacy, Small/Rural Libraries, etc.) who are responsible for working with Maine libraries to ensure then have the tools they need, as well as needed consultation and advice, to make them stronger organizations. Additionally, this department helps to support the growth of online professional development and learning resources through subscriptions available in the Digital Maine Library.

Usually our Library Development specialists visit libraries and host in-person meetings. This past year the team put in place a vast series of virtual meetings and programs in order to deliver services. Since March 17, 2020 total librarian attendance at our virtual meetings reached nearly 7,000 attendees. The cornerstone of these meetings has been (and continues to be) a weekly meeting of Maine librarians to simply check in and discuss what is happening in the state and nationally – discuss best demonstrated practices for handling operations during the pandemic. Other highlights include ongoing professional development meetings and a weekly STEM education/activity for students and teachers, which has been held every Wednesday.

Perhaps the highlight of work the Library Development department led, was the development of a specific COVID Re-Opening Checklist specifically for libraries that was included in the Governor’s/CDC re-opening guidance back in late May/June. This has provided Maine libraries with a myriad of details to refer to and rely on when assessing if their library is ready to open and begin offering a wide variety of services.

Suffice it to say, all three core departments of the Maine State Library have thrived over the past year, and we look forward to doing so in the years to come – this fund in the budget has and will continue to support all these important services.

Statewide Library Information System Fund: Page A-391 (Original Part A Budget Submission)

This fund (General Fund) provides support to both the Maine State Library’s Digital Repository and the Digital Maine Library. All three of the Maine State Library’s departments have a role in managing the platforms/content that the funds in this program support.

This year we added tens of thousands of items to our digital repository (<https://digitalmaine.com/>), which now hosts more than 170,000 digital documents. Of these, nearly 1.5 million unique downloads have taken place in the last year, and program to date, nearly 2.5 million unique downloads have taken place. While most of our downloads come from Maine, we know that people all over the world are accessing our collections.

The Maine State Library is the statewide service hub for getting digital materials from all statewide collecting organizations into the Digital Public Library of America (DPLA).

Additionally, the State Library is one of the lead organizations for providing content and support for the statewide Digital Maine library (<https://library.digitalmaine.org>) which is a key resource for students and citizens. The Digital Maine Library hosts hundreds of subscription-based contents, which allows people to access to millions of digital materials (articles, publications, datasets, learning tools, etc.).

Challenges

While the Maine State Library recognizes the importance of fiscal prudence given the uncertainty of economic conditions ahead of us, we will face challenges regarding the rising costs of critical services.

- **Digital and Online Content:** We anticipate a minimum 4% cost increase for some subscription purchases – all at a time when the demand for such resources is growing.

This is amplified by the fact that local libraries, under budget restraints, are canceling online content subscriptions, and further creating demand. The impact of this increase is expected to be approximately \$20,000 as it relates to subscription services provided by the Maine State Library in FY22.

- **Van Delivery/Interlibrary Loan Services:** The courier related costs to deliver materials increased by 30% on January 1, 2020 (as a result of an RFP). Further, the courier company is located in Portland and a recent referendum resulted in hazard pay for all employees working and operating in Portland (which is where the courier company resides). As a result, costs have increased by just over \$500 per week as a result of this. Finally, beginning July 1, 2021, it is anticipated that a per-stop increase of up to \$0.80 is likely. This equates to an increase for the Maine State Library of approximately \$9,500 in FY22.

Thank you for your time today. I'd be happy to answer any questions the Committee members may have.

Respectfully,

Jamie Ritter