

Maine State Library
Testimony – Lori Fisher, Maine State Librarian

132nd Maine Legislature
Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs
Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

LD 210 – “An Act Making Unified Appropriations and Allocations from the General Fund and Other Funds for the Expenditures of State Government and Changing Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government for the Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 2025, June 30, 2026, and June 30, 2027.”

February 7, 2025

Senator Rotundo, Representative Gatine, members of the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs; Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs, my name is Lori Fisher, and I am your State Librarian. I am speaking in support of the Maine State Library’s items in the Biennial Budget, which appear on pages A-497 to A-503 of Part A of the budget proposal.

Introduction

Established in 1837, the Maine State Library (MSL) 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).

MSL is made up of three departments: Collection Development and Digital Initiatives; Public and Outreach Services; and Library Development.

The budget submitted will enable these core departments to carry out their essential work. The testimony that follows underscores the importance of our work and highlights challenges before us.

Administration: Page A-497

This fund supports 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 MSL. Additionally, MSL is one of four key agencies that partner to support the Maine School and Library Network (MSLN), which delivers high-speed fiber broadband to nearly 900 libraries and schools across Maine. I am currently chairwoman of that board for the next two years, and we are closely watching what is happening with the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) as well as the Supreme Court case related to the Universal Service Fund, which includes the eRate program (a major component of Maine’s nationally acknowledged success in providing

Internet to all Maine schools and 90% of Maine's public libraries). All of the libraries have a 1 gigabit fiber connection except for 4 island libraries. The other agency partners for MSLN are OIT, DOE, and the University of Maine.

Blind and Visually Impaired News Access Fund: Page A-498

This fund (Special Revenue Fund) receives its revenue from the Maine Public Utilities Commission's portion of the Universal Service Fund. MSL then administers content subscriptions, most notably Newsline provided by the National Federation for the Blind, to ensure that those Maine residents who are blind or have visual impairments can access news services 24/7. There is no change to this budget compared to previous years.

Imagination Library of Maine Program: Page A-499

Dolly Parton's Imagination Library provides a high-quality book each month to children from birth to their fifth birthday, mailed to their home, at no cost to their families. Numerous studies make it clear that reading with young children from birth to age 5 is critical for cognitive and language development, building vocabulary, increased familiarity with books, bonding experiences with trusted adults, fostering an enjoyment of reading, building kindergarten readiness skills, and more. There are numerous studies (linked on the Dollywood Foundation web site, <https://imaginationlibrary.com/news-resources/research/>) that show how this program promotes changes in home literacy environments, children's attitudes toward reading, and early literacy skills.

The Dollywood Foundation, which oversees the Imagination Library program, provides the infrastructure to keep the costs low for participating counties and states by the sheer volume of books ordered each month, which exceeds 3 million in the US. The program launched statewide in Maine in December 2023 with funding from the state legislature covering 50% of the cost of the books and shipping. The remaining 50% must be raised locally by county nonprofits, that also provide administrative oversight at the local level. Per the Dollywood Foundation, any local programs joining since our statewide launch must cover an entire county. There are currently 6 (soon to be 7) county level programs operating. Unlike a number of states that engage very successfully in the Imagination Library program, Maine's lack of an organized county government structure, and few county-wide nonprofits, makes this prescribed infrastructure challenging to spread the program further to all 16 counties. Over 3,500 parents have expressed interest in registering their children in counties that do not have the program available, with 600 parents in York county alone. In addition, this program is even more important since the statewide Raising Readers program ended in 2023, thus limiting the ways young children can receive free books to build literacy skills at home. The funding options in front of the legislature for Imagination Library thus include the continued state funding share for 50% of the costs for books and shipping for FY2026-2027, as well as another one-time initiative funding the 50% affiliate costs. This is proposed to ensure that all Maine children under 5 would be eligible to receive books at no cost to their families during these two fiscal years, with targeted effort during the biennium to get non-profit commitment in the remaining counties to take on the 50% affiliate funding responsibility starting in FY28.

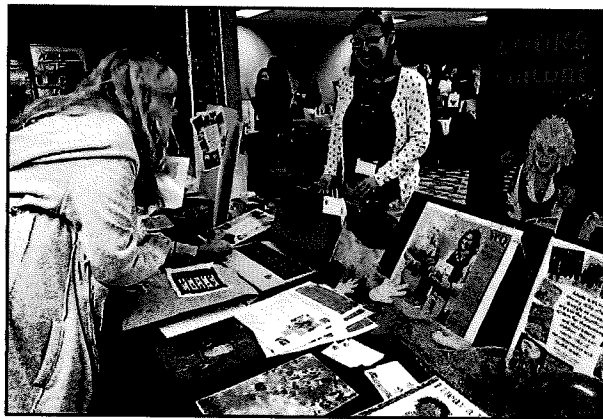
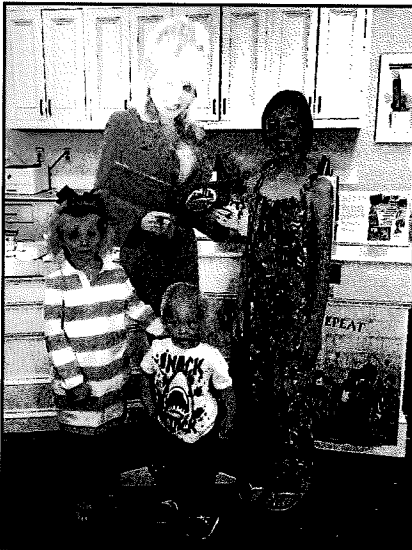
Supplemental information about Maine's Imagination Library program, 2/2/2025

<i>County</i>	<i>Affiliate</i>	<i>Start date</i>	<i>Enrolled children</i>
Washington	Literacy Volunteers of Washington County, Dennysville	Apr 2007	501
Aroostook	United Way of Aroostook, Presque Isle	Apr 2010	1,855
Oxford	Friends of Porter 569, Parsonsfield	Oct 2019	1,129
Penobscot 1	Millinocket Memorial Library, Millinocket	April 2022	186
Penobscot 2	My First Bookshelf, Stafford, VA	Mar 2023	2,885
Knox	Camden Public Library, Camden	Mar 2024	570
Waldo	Belfast Free Library, Belfast	Jun 2024	589
*Kennebec	Literacy Volunteers of Kennebec, Augusta	Feb 2025	-0- *

* Committed, but not yet operating (anticipated start this month); to date, 630 local parents have expressed interest in enrolling their 837 children.



Current total enrollment, including affiliates of additional smaller areas: 8,196



(Left) photo-op with Dolly in the Belfast Free Library; (Center) Taking a moment to register a child for DPIL at Reading Round Up; (Right) At Porter Memorial



Notes:

The figures above fluctuate each month as some new children may be added, others may age out (because they have reached their 5th birthday), and some families may relocate outside the affiliate area. With Kennebec County on board, the number enrolled will likely soon approach 9,000 out of approximately 62,000 kids under 5 in Maine.

There have been over a dozen Maine DPIL affiliates, some dating back to 2002, before it was a requirement to represent an entire county; and thus there are some pre-existing, grandfathered small pockets of participation, though some have folded.

In the case of Penobscot County, My First Bookshelf serves residents of all the towns not in the pre-existing Millinocket Library coverage area (Millinocket, E. Millinocket, Medway, Stacyville, Cedar Lake, and Indian Purchase Township, and Long A Township).

Maine Public Library Fund: Page A-500

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 2024 over \$50,000 was collected through these incredible voluntary contributions. The funds are used to directly support Maine's public libraries through grants that allow libraries to develop impactful 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.

Maine State Library: Page A-501 through A-503

This is MSL's primary operating fund (General Fund and Federal Fund) account that supports the bulk of services delivered by the State Library. MSL's three departments are represented through this program.

Collections and Digital Initiatives is responsible for the acquisition, cataloging and care of the library's holdings. This includes over seven linear miles of shelved books, government documents and periodicals. The vast majority of our permanent collection pertains to Maine – books on Maine people, places, and public policy, books by Maine authors, and a local history and genealogy collection that is the largest of its kind north of Boston. MSL also holds a significant collection of historical maps and unique special collections pertaining to the history of our state.

Newspapers are also an important part of our collection. We maintain subscriptions to every current daily and local newspaper published in the state (currently 78 titles) and maintain an archive of millions of pages of historical newspapers in bound volumes and over a thousand reels of microfilmed papers – many of which may not exist anywhere else in any other format.

This department is also primarily responsible for building digital collections and helping to maintain access to MSL's digital platforms. I'll talk more about those services in a moment.

The Public and Outreach Services department serves Maine residents through a public/circulating library. The primary purpose of our public operation is to provide Maine residents access to our collections, research and reference services and public computing support. The public also attends special programs hosted by MSL.

When we resided in the Cultural Building, we were typically open 50 hours per week, and in a traditional year served approximately 75,000 visitors. At this time we are open 40 hours per week and staff two facilities: one for public services at 242 State Street, and one for collections storage, van delivery, and inter-library loan services in leased space in Winthrop. MSL continues to be a destination for people all over the state and the nation, and we very much look forward to moving back into the Cultural Building starting in September 2025.

A very important component to our public services is under the auspices of “Outreach Services.” This includes two very unique programs – Talking Books Plus 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 residents. The Books by Mail program literally mails books to Maine citizens that are homebound and/or in communities that are not served by 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 (for Federal Fiscal Year 2024, MSL received just over \$1.5 million). The department’s core function is to ensure Maine libraries have the tools and resources necessary to deliver critical services in their communities in response to local need.

A team of Specialists provide consulting services for library staff in strategic areas including library management and technology, workforce development, STEM, and youth services. A cornerstone of the work is to support the continuing education needs of Maine’s library workforce - the majority of whom do not hold a degree in Library Science. Additionally, the Specialists monitor social and economic trends impacting the vitality of Maine’s communities, so libraries are equipped to respond to local challenges, directly and/or in partnership with other community organizations. This work is accomplished through a combination of in-person workshops, virtual and hybrid sessions, asynchronous online courses, site visits, and one-on-one consultations. Consultations average 220 per month (about 2,600 over the last two years). Virtual programming began in response to the pandemic and proved successful in connecting with Maine’s more rural and remote libraries that had

not often participated in in-person training programs (primarily because of travel time and costs). Library Development is broadening its virtual and hybrid offerings to continue to reach these libraries. The department also supports the growth of online professional development and learning resources through subscriptions available in the Digital Maine Library.

Turnover among public library directors has been over 60% in the last four years which impacts the services those libraries are able to offer their communities. To mitigate this trend and ensure a strong library workforce, Library Development instituted an intensive intervention approach for directors in the position 3 years or less during the past three fiscal years. To gain further insight into the issues facing libraries across the state, I refer you to the special edition of the Maine Policy Review on libraries, published in January 2025 and available to everyone through the Digital Maine Repository: <https://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/mpr/vol33/iss2/>

Library Development also supports grant initiatives including the Maine Public Library Fund grant program, the collaboration with the Department of Economic and Community Development to expand remote work and co-working opportunities in Maine communities through libraries, and a partnership with the Gulf of Maine Research Institute to foster community resilience in the face of extreme weather events. The department also partners with the Maine Connectivity Authority to promote access to broadband and increase digital literacy skills across the state.

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.

Specific initiatives where we are asking for increased funding in this biennium budget:

- **Page A-501: \$133,920 (FY26) and \$143,341 (FY27), continues and makes permanent one Librarian-Specialized Services position**

This Librarian- Specialized Services position is one of three that MSL funds directly for Maine InfoNet (MIN), a non-profit consortium for libraries in our state that is supported by both Maine State Library and the University of Maine. The position was created in the last biennium as a temporary position to assist the rest of the MIN staff with the implementation and migrations associated with the ILS systems for the URSUS consortium, which includes the University of Maine

system libraries, Bangor Public Library, Maine State Library, Portland Public Library, and the Maine Law and Legislative Reference library. Together the URSUS collection provides access to over three million unique titles.

This position is integral to Maine InfoNet's ability to continue to provide direct library system support to the multiple consortia that MIN manages. Daily support requests have grown significantly, and this position assists with answering those support inquiries as well as training both current and new library partners. With the expansion of MIN systems from one suite of software and tools to an expanded consortial environment that includes three distinctive suites of software with different operating systems, this position provides necessary back up to other staff for timely resolution of technical and operational issues.

- **Page A-501: \$75,000 each year for increased rate charged for van delivery service across the state.** In accordance with Title 27 § 39, MSL manages a van delivery service so that residents of the State have access to over 1.5 million physical materials through the State's library network. In 2024 MSL conducted a Request for Proposal process for the service, with all bids submitted between 33% and 77% higher in cost than the per stop rate in the previous biennium. This RFP process went through an appeal by the previous vendor, necessitating an eight week pause in service that received a lot of publicity (which truly underscored how critical this service is for residents across Maine). After the new contract was approved by procurement, the service restarted on 8/26/24.

MSL, through the Maine Library Commission, has instituted a minimum annual inter-library loan (ILL) threshold for public libraries to join the service – 100 ILLs minimum for the previous calendar year. Previously any public library could join and MSL would pay for their one day per week service, which unfortunately allowed some libraries to participate with only 20 or less ILL transactions per year. This could not continue if we want to make the service as cost-effective and sustainable as possible. For the service start up in FY25, we removed 15 libraries from the service that did not meet this threshold, and we are working with them if they want to ILL service in their community going forward to exceed the new threshold.

In addition the Maine Library Commission voted in late 2024 to convert the Van Delivery Task Force, comprised of 10 representatives from library stakeholder groups that use this service, into a Sub-Committee of the Commission, formalizing the regular promotion and evaluation of the service.

The breakdown of this initiative request is as follows:

- \$31,000 each year to pay for new eligible public libraries to join the service. In FY26, we have 14 public libraries eligible to join the service, with one day of service per week paid for by MSL.
 - \$30,000 each year to eliminate the need for MSL to begin charging all libraries a percentage of the one day per week of service that MSL has traditionally funded at no cost to those libraries. We informed libraries last summer that every library will need to pay a small percentage of the total bill starting in FY26, and for the smallest libraries on the service this is a challenging ask. This money would eliminate the need to institute this change in the biennium
 - \$14,000 each year to address the increased per stop cost of the service for MSL and the one day per week that we pay for all public libraries on the service. Since the service in FY25 was for 10 months and not a full year, MSL was able to cover the cost with existing funds.
- **Page A-501: \$130,797 in allotment each year for increased anticipated federal funding (National Digital Newspaper Program, NDNP).** In 2025, MSL received another NDNP grant through the National Endowment of the Humanities to continue digitizing French newspapers in Maine. This grant runs through 2026, and we need to increase the allotment in the account to cover the grant award. We do plan to submit a new grant proposal in 2026, that would run through 2027.
 - **Page A-502: Reduction in funding in MSL Private Support, Other Special Revenues Funds.** In 2024, MSL and Maine InfoNet (MIN) signed an MOU that allows MIN to act as fiscal agent to collect van service monies from libraries paying for additional days of van delivery per week. MIN is already is a known entity for all of these libraries due to their coordination of Integrated Library Systems (i.e. online catalogs). This change streamlined van service billing for these libraries. Because MSL is no longer taking in revenues from libraries to pay for the service, this account funding can be lowered for the next biennium and this account will now only hold unrestricted donations to MSL.
 - **Page A-502: Provides small initial allotment for the MSL Talking Books, Other Special Revenue Funds account.**
 - **Page A-502: Provides allocation for the Maine State Library's Collections Preservation, Other Special Revenue Funds account.**

In 2024, MSL established these two special revenue accounts due to the restricted nature of these donations. Previously, they were lumped into the same special revenue account used to hold van

service payments from libraries. Due to typical donor restrictions on these monies, a separate account for each will make accounting and tracking cleaner. This action will provide a small initial allotment for the accounts as donations grow over time and we determine how to spend the monies.

- **Page A-502: Increases allotment for MSL's Reading Round-Up Conference in their other special revenue funds account.** The Reading Round Up Conference is the largest annual library conference held in Maine, with close to 500 attendees every year from school, public, and academic libraries. This conference is self-funded and requires no direct state funding to continue. An increase in allotment for this fund is necessary in the biennium due to rising costs for venues, audio-visual equipment rental, and keynote speakers.
- **Page A-502: Reallocates 10% of one Librarian-Specialized Services between Federal Expenditures Fund accounts within the same program and provides funding for the operational needs in the Real World Real Science Project.**

This request is to allow MSL's Gulf of Maine Research Institute grant to cover 10% of one Librarian-Specialized Services position that focuses on STEM programs. 40% of this position is covered by IMLS LSTA Grants to State federal funds, and the other 50% of the position is general funded.

Statewide Library Information System Fund: Page A-503 through A-504

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 and content that the funds in this program support. The content supports lifelong learning for all ages and interests, including K-12 and college students, through high quality, authoritative resources. Examples include digital newspapers such as the five major Maine newspapers and hundreds of national newspapers and other media outlets through US Newsstream; genealogical information and documents from Ancestry; job-ready classes and practice professional exams through Learning Express; full-text articles from trade and industry-related periodicals for high schools, community colleges, and trade institutions in the Vocational and Career collection; and the Read It resource for students and adults who have a basic foundation in English grammar and reading but need adapted reading materials for a variety of subjects.

We have brought all of these resources together through the Digital Maine Library (www.digitalmaine.org) online portal where any Mainer can access this licensed content through

geoauthentication (verifying by IP address that they are located in Maine) or by logging-in using their library card number. In 2024 MSL conducted a Request for Proposal process that resulted in a new statewide content package from EBSCO. Input from the stakeholder task force of 16 representatives from all types of libraries across Maine was key to the drafting and implementation of a successful RFP, and the work of this group continues as a formalized sub-committee of the Maine Library Commission, focused on the ongoing promotion, training, and evaluation of this statewide service.

Some of our most important and sought-after digital content pertains to the rich history of our state. Through our Digital Maine Repository (www.digitalmaine.com), the Maine State Library has collaborated with the Maine State Archives and the Maine Law and Legislative Reference Library to build online collections that provide transparency in government and offer insight into how public policy has evolved over time.

We have also partnered with over 80 libraries, museums, and historical societies around Maine and over two-dozen other organizations ranging from churches, trade groups, fraternal organizations, municipal governments, public policy groups and arts organizations to provide access to community-specific collections ranging from local history books, town reports, historical newspapers, and a variety of other source materials for people with an interest in learning more about the past.

To facilitate this work, we've invested in scanning technology that we allow collecting institutions to use as no charge to facilitate digitization of their Maine-related holdings. During the renovation, our two large book scanning units were moved to a small scan lab we set up on the first floor of the Cross Office Building in the space that was once occupied by OPEGA (Office of Program Evaluation and Government Accountability). We would welcome the opportunity to give you a tour of that operation.

Last month, as we marked the 12-year anniversary of the launch of this service, the content download count surpassed 6.2 million.

- **Page A-503: Provides funding for the financial and human resources service center cost for MSL.**

- **Page A-503: Provides funding for the statewide technology services provided by Office of Information Technology.**

These figures were provided to us by the Department of Administrative and Financial Services.

- **Page A-503: \$25,000 each year for cloudLibrary costs to revitalize statewide downloadable program.** Title 27 § 39 requires the State Library to promote resource sharing among Maine's libraries. The downloadable books program is administered by Maine InfoNet. MIN pays the current cloudLibrary platform fee and purchases content, as do participating libraries, with individual library-purchased content shared statewide.

One of the challenges with our current downloadable book program, cloudLibrary, is the lack of Kindle compatibility. Over a decade ago, our downloadable book vendor included Kindle compatibility for school, academic, and public library use. Due to contractual changes from the vendor, our service lost Kindle compatibility in order to keep schools in the consortium. The whole point of a consortium is to keep costs down and allow even the smallest of libraries to take part for the benefit of their community members.

Currently, Maine's cloudLibrary has seen over 732,000 checkouts statewide in calendar year 2024, with communities such as Lewiston having close to 9,000 checkouts and spending \$10,113 on downloadable content during that same time period. That is a cost per circulation of \$1.15 for Lewiston – a really good Return on Investment that would improve if Kindle compatibility became available. MIN and MSL are forming a task force of library stakeholders to revamp this program and look at other vendor possibilities so that we can provide the best access possible to downloadable content for all Maine residents. This funding would in part pay for a platform for Kindle content and also allow MSL to purchase content that can be shared statewide.

- **Page A-503 \$10,000 each year for continued expansion of the Large Print program**

In the current biennium, we asked for a total of \$65,000 to meet a specific goal in the 2023-2027 Institute of Museum and Library Services, Library Services & Technology Act 5 year plan for Maine: to increase access to materials for Maine residents who are visually impaired, have a disability, and/or reside in an underserved community. We have met this goal in part by revamping our Large Print collection, bringing it up to date with more titles and genres. These materials can be borrowed statewide by any Maine resident. Maine has the oldest median population in the nation, and these types of resources are crucial for our aging population. In addition, we have found a demand for

youth large print titles among children with visual impairments, and have been working with the Lewiston Public Library to address the needs of this population. As of 2/1/25, large print circulation is the third highest circulating collection at MSL, and is just under 9% of our total circulation (while accounting for less than 1% of our collection materials). The monies requested will allow us to continue to refresh and augment this heavily used collection.

Testimonial about MSL's large print collection received from Ila Turner in Portland, Maine, that illustrates the impact of this service on her quality of life:

"As I approached my late 50s and early 60s, I could no longer see to read regular print books. We were now in the age of eBooks, and while some of them could be enlarged enough that I could read them, often I was left with headaches that persisted 48 hours or more. There is also the considerable cost of books. I have been disabled since 1995, and have relied on my local libraries for audiobooks so I could continue to enjoy books. As one author put it to me, I was reading with my ears. But it just wasn't the same.

My caseworker at Seniors Plus told me about the Large Print Books at ME State Library and filled out the necessary paperwork so I could become a patron. I lack words to express how happy I was when the first books arrived, and I could read a physical book again. Without the Maine State Library Large Print Book Collection, the dedicated and helpful staff and all they offer, all this would be impossible for so many.

I live with intense chronic pain daily. There are days I can't walk without assistance, even to the bathroom. Reading helps to deal with that pain in ways that I or my doctors can't explain.

When I am reading one of the Large Print Books, I leave my pain behind, and I enjoy the time spent in the book, with the people I am interacting with, and yes, some who we fall in love with, such as Jamie in the Outlander books by Diana Gabaldon. Thank you for your time, and please continue to support this vital program."

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

Respectfully,
Lori Fisher
Maine State Librarian