

**Maine State Library**  
**Testimony – Lori Stockman, Maine State Librarian**

Second Regular Session, 132<sup>nd</sup> Maine Legislature  
Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs  
Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

*LD 2212 – “An Act Making Unified Supplemental Appropriations and Allocations for the Expenditures of State Government, General Fund and Other Funds, Changing Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government for the Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 2026 and June 30, 2027.”*

February 20, 2026

Senator Rotundo, Representative Gattine, 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 Stockman, and I am your State Librarian. I am speaking in support of the Maine State Library’s items in the Supplemental Budget, which appear on pages A-89 and A-90 of Part A of the budget proposal.

**Introduction**

2025 was a year of change for Maine State Library (MSL). Due to inaccessibility of our federal FY25 Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) funding (\$1.5 million) starting in March 2025, we were obligated to lay off 8 staff funded through that annual grant in May. While the funds were fully reinstated by the end of July 2025, the damage was done and many uncertainties about the future of that federal funding remain. MSL retrenched, taking a hard look at all services and prioritizing those that have the greatest positive impact on the most Mainers. Library Development and Public Outreach departments were hit the hardest, with Library Development losing half of their staff (going from 5 to 2), and Public Outreach lost 4 circulation staff. While we have brought back one position in Library Development on our current federal FY25 grant, the uncertainties around future federal funding mean we are scenario-positioning, not scenario-planning, for how our critical services can be provided going forward.

While FY26 IMLS LSTA monies were included in the latest budget bill, recently passed by Congress and signed into law by the President, I have not yet received an award letter, and uncertainties around this money for state FY27 remain a concern. There is still a threat that a rescission process could take place, similar to what happened to PBS, and we would again lose access to our federal funding. The two lawsuits involving IMLS are still in the courts, with the 21 states lawsuit (for which I provided a Declaration of Impact) currently facing an appeal from the Administration. The permanent injunction being appealed by the Administration is the only thing keeping IMLS staff employed and the agency functioning. Last, we do not know if the President will again zero out IMLS in his federal FY27 budget proposal slated to be released around the time of his State of the Union address at the end of February. While we hope for the best, it is clear that we should position ourselves for the possibility of no federal funding for our statewide operations, specifically regarding critical personnel costs.

**Maine State Library general fund 0217 and Statewide Library Information System 0185: Pages A-89 and A-90**

**Personnel-related initiatives:**

Given the situation described above related to our annual IMLS LSTA funding for FY26 and the future, MSL leadership has taken stock of our highest priorities for continuity of service and identified 3 major areas where we need to move previously federally funded positions/services to state funding. MSL leadership took the time to retrench and assess what is vital to service continuity while amending/curtailing other services that are not as vital to overall statewide services to libraries and/or Maine residents. We have three critical personnel requests in this FY27 supplemental budget, moving their support from federal funding to general funding: half of the Maine InfoNet Executive Director's salary; our full-time Library Section Supervisor in Public Outreach; and a full-time Librarian-Specialized Services position in Library Development. What these three positions have in common is their focus on accessibility to information by all Mainers through resource-sharing among Maine libraries.

Maine InfoNet (MIN) is a collaborative of academic, public, school, and special libraries that band together to foster resource sharing across the state. The executive director position is funded through a cooperative agreement with the University of Maine, where MSL pays for half of the cost and the University pays the other half. This position provides the leadership for this small but

mighty collaborative of 7 staff. Their work includes promoting access to materials through MaineCat, our statewide union catalog system that allows all library collections to be accessible to the public through any library; management of individual online catalog systems for over 100 libraries; facilitating the connection to MaineCat for another 59 libraries; and also assisting MSL to provide access to digital resources for Maine residents through Digital Maine Library and the Download Library. This position is vital and our resource-sharing through interlibrary loan statewide cannot function without it.

The second request, for our full-time Library Section Supervisor in Public Outreach, is critical due to the supervisory role over our Circulation staff, the responsibility this position has as Director of our Talking Books program and supervision the statewide Homebound Services program. MSL staff are finally moving back into the Cultural Building after over 6 years of renovations. The circulation staff at MSL were cut by four positions in the layoff. We are going to have a challenging time re-opening to the public for 36 hours per week in FY27 and will not be able to provide the 51 hours of open time as we did prior to the pandemic due to those staff losses. The cross-training and management of any of our staff who now will have duties at the circulation desk where materials are requested, checked in/out, or received from other libraries through either mail or van delivery will be key to our successful re-opening, and this position has responsibility for all of that coordination. In addition, as the Director of our Talking Books program, this position allows MSL to serve as the regional library for the National Library Services for the Blind and Physically Handicapped (NLS). This program alone circulates over 100,000 titles per year to this unique population of Mainers.

Last, our third personnel priority is to have one of the Librarian-Specialized Services positions moved from federal funding to general funding. The Library Development department, which supports libraries (particularly the 257 public libraries) across the state, was cut in half losing 3 of their 5 staff due to the layoffs in May 2025. With over 70% of our public libraries serving a population of under 5,000 people, these small/rural libraries need additional support to make sure their communities and residents receive the best access to information and library services that they can provide. The remaining Library Development staff conducted a Listening Tour this past fall, visiting libraries in every county and convening conversations with librarians about their needs so that the retrenchment of their department was grounded in factual assessments from the field. This was also important to conduct given the turnover of 60% of library directors statewide since 2021.

From professional development opportunities, to connecting librarians to other librarians when questions about programs for their communities arise, to assisting boards of trustees to understand their roles, we need an additional position to help field questions and carry out the newly refined and focused vision of public library support from MSL.

There is one other personnel initiative in the supplemental budget that I need to mention quickly just because the “why” for this ask is not clearly evident in the initiative wording. Due to general fund personnel savings in FY25 because of two retirements, when the layoffs occurred in May 2025 we were able to move one position, the Interlibrary Loan Coordinator, to general funding for FY26. This position is critical for Area Resource and Reference Center responsibilities for MSL that are provided to small libraries in central Maine that cannot afford to participate in statewide van delivery. The initiative in the Supplemental budget makes this position general funded going forward with no additional expense in the general fund. In addition, we took two part-time general funded positions that were part of the layoff (both were half general funded, half federally funded) and are asking to move them both to 100% federally funded in case we are able to get consistent federal funding going forward and wish to hire for these positions. This will save the general fund over \$32,000 in FY27.

**AI-related initiatives:**

The four initiatives in MSL’s budget requests related to the Governor’s AI Task Force recommendations, totaling \$2.25 million, is a testament to the Governor’s strong belief in the value of libraries within their local communities. Libraries are often the first place that community members go to when they need to use new technologies to accomplish critical tasks such as apply for jobs, create a resume, or submit information online for a state or federal programs. With libraries having the only free Internet access in our local communities, having AI education take place through libraries makes sense in order to reach the most Mainers, particularly those who are less resourced.

One aspect my team is taking very seriously in our planning around this next iteration of information literacy is the wide range of beliefs about AI across the spectrum of both the library community and the public in general. We will need to provide discussion facilitation assistance to communities through library staff in public libraries in order to have productive conversations about

this technology. Unfortunately as we have seen across the political spectrum, often discussion is shut down by the use of particular words, or by assumptions that pigeonhole individuals into very rigid categories. There is a continuum of perspectives about AI, with none being “wrong” – and we need to learn how to have those conversations both internally in libraries and externally in communities in order for Mainers to make intentional decisions about AI in their individual and collective lives. To ascertain exactly where the Maine library community is with AI adoption, conversations within their community, and ability to hold impactful community-wide facilitated conversations, MSL will be conducting a survey of library staff across Maine in April 2026 to gather as much information as possible on current viewpoints, use, and knowledge around AI in our libraries, focusing on public libraries in particular.

The monies designated to sub-grant to public libraries for trainings, hardware, and other needs related to artificial intelligence is a great way to also address some infrastructure needs of Maine’s public libraries. On 12/18/25, The US Government Accountability Office released a report *Public Libraries: Many Buildings Are Reported to be in Poor Condition, with Increasing Deferred Maintenance*. Federal funding through IMLS has been generally available for library programs and services, not for construction, repairs, or infrastructure upgrades, and there is no state aid for library construction/renovation. This sub-grant money could allow libraries to upgrade old wiring to address on-site connectivity needs of patrons (more outlets to charge devices; alternative ways to charge devices using a USB connection instead of a typical plug; upgrades to wireless equipment; and to upgrade connections between the library building and a fiber optic line). Maine libraries were part of the GAO research for the report, with a team visiting Maine for a week in 2025. Many of our libraries are in older historic buildings, with little to no local funding ability to keep up with the infrastructure changes necessary to meet the technological demands of our society today.

In addition, competitive grants to deploy and implement a public literacy and safety program related to AI will give a number of our Maine libraries (public, school, academic, and special) the ability to address community needs around this technology while simultaneously addressing the wider scope of benefits and concerns that we are seeing nationally.

MSL will partner with various entities, many mentioned in the Maine Artificial Intelligence Task Force Report, to address the public literacy and safety program and media/outreach about that

program. In particular, we will be exploring partnerships with Northeastern University's Roux Institute, Colby College's Davis Institute for Artificial Intelligence, Bowdoin College's Hastings Initiative for AI & Humanity, and the University of Maine's AI Innovation Hub and badge credentialing initiative for faculty and students. We will also leverage current relationships and structures within the Maine library legislative statutes for this work, including the Area Reference & Resource Centers (ARRCs), which include Portland Public Library and Bangor Public Library, and the Maine Library Advisory Council (MLAC). Last, we do need to make sure we include the Maine tribes and New Mainer communities in a public literacy and safety program.

**Update on the Cultural Building:**

The Maine State Library is finally beginning to move back into the Cultural Building after 6 years of renovations. Our collections were all moved into our spaces and we had seven of our 36 staff move into the building in early February. We still have much to do. The rest of our staff will not move into the building until early April, and then we have to focus on security system completion (cameras, badge readers, door locks/access), installation of RFID equipment at our public entry points, and training for staff before we can open to the public. But I can say with certainty right now that MSL will re-open to the public from the Cultural Building in 2026, and you'll all receive an invitation to our grand re-opening. We'll have public telework stations on our main floor, which some legislators may find to be useful during the legislative session next year.

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

Respectfully,

Lori Stockman

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