

The Honorable Nick LaLota
515 Hauppauge Road
Suite 3b
Hauppauge, New York 11788

Dear Representative LaLota,

I am writing on behalf of Harborfields Public Library and the more than 18,500 residents of the community who rely on its services. I would like to express my deep concerns regarding the Federal budget, particularly elements that directly affect Suffolk County library patrons and taxpayers. As you know the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) Grants to States Program has been cancelled. This action withdraws 85% of the federally appropriated aid to the New York State Library and Division of Library Development (DLD). The consequences of this decision will be profound, including a significant impact on all of Suffolk's libraries and by extension, our professions, patrons, communities.

In the past year, members of the community visited the library over 180,000 times, with 32,000 attending various programs. As the heart of a vibrant community, the library offers a wide range of services—from concerts, to borrowing books, movies, and other media in both print and digital formats. In 2024 alone, the library loaned over 120,000 items. Additionally, the library plays a crucial role in supporting job seekers and entrepreneurs by providing re-skilling programs, small business counseling, and high-speed Wi-Fi that was accessed over 45,000 times.

The first thing that I ask is that the Federal government remain front and center with ensuring local residents have access to universal and affordable broadband services.

The E-Rate program, funded through the Universal Service Fund, is in need of stable and permanent Federal funding. This program brings in nearly \$100M to New York's libraries and schools to ensure that students, seniors, entrepreneurs, job seekers, and all New Yorkers have access to high-speed broadband through their public libraries and schools. On Long Island, the funding amount totals nearly \$35 million. Without this funding, libraries and schools would face two difficult options: either eliminating broadband internet access for local residents or raising local property taxes by an additional \$35 million. At a time when the Federal government has eliminated state and local tax (SALT) deductions, and with Long Islanders paying significantly more into the Federal budget than they receive back in services, neither option is tenable.

I call on you to speak to leadership in the House and demand that universal and affordable broadband continues to be made available through the Federal E-Rate program.

E-Rate is not only an education and economic development issue—it is also a vital public safety concern. Our libraries and schools depend on these internet connections to communicate with local government, fire districts, and law enforcement during times of crisis.

I also urge Congress to increase Federal funding to enhance and expand library services. The Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) provides funding to libraries which is administered by the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS). This represents the largest source of Federal funding for library services in the United States.

State library agencies, like New York, receive LSTA funding to support statewide initiatives and services all to the benefit of local libraries and the communities they serve. The approximately \$8M that New York receives in LSTA funding allows local libraries and systems to access state aid, construction grants, and a wide array of support services which assist and promote library services throughout New York.

I urge you to speak with House leadership and advocate for the stability of LSTA and IMLS funding in the Federal budget, ensuring that your constituents continue to have access to the world-class library services they rely on and deserve.

Libraries are an important part of New York's education ecosystem and are centers for lifelong learning. Libraries coordinate programs and offer resources to increase and strengthen the reading skills of children and adults. Reading is the gateway to success in education, work and life; it strengthens problem solving, language and communication skills and enables adults to decode critical health, financial, and other information.

I strongly encourage Congress to include libraries as key partners in legislation supporting reading.

The first early reading experiences of many children come from library story times and books. Children who learn to read proficiently early in life have a much greater chance of succeeding academically and in the workforce.

Libraries across New York State are committed to supporting their communities by helping patrons with educational, workforce development, and employment needs. They also provide access to cultural programs and resources, both in print and digital formats, to foster curiosity and learning. In short, libraries are indispensable, and I trust you share this view.

Sincerely,