

TESTIMONY

-James Ritter, State Librarian-

01-27-2021

Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

Senator Daughtry, Representative Brennan, and the distinguished members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee, my name is Jamie Ritter and I am the State Librarian providing testimony on behalf of the Maine State Library.

Established in 1837, the Maine State Library is one of the state's first cultural agencies, 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.

There are three categories of information that I'll share with you today:

- 1) Who we are and What We do
- 2) Specific Stimulus Funding and Activities
- 3) Challenges

Who We are and What We Do – Our Success

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.

Collection Development and Digital Initiatives:

This department is responsible for all of the 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, the largest collection of genealogical materials north of Boston. We collect all

Maine news papers that are in print, and have over 20,000 roles of microfilm for many of Maine's newspapers (past and present). This year we added tens of thousands of items in our digital repository, 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 (library.digitalmaine.org), which is a key resource for students and citizens.

During the pandemic, our collection development and digital initiatives did not cease! We continued to ensure that the resources in our collection are robust and accessible!

Public and Outreach Services – Research and Innovation:

Maine is unique in that we offer a circulating collection (a working open-to-the-public 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. Certainly during the pandemic, our in-service operations were closed to the public, however, 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. Even in the midst of an extensive facility move (that I’ll discuss later), we have continued our curbside service! We expect to open to the public again soon at a temporary location.

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), provides 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. I am pleased to tell you that both of these critical services remained in full force throughout the pandemic – and in fact became in more demand because of it. When we say that we “Help People” we mean it!

Finally, the “Research and Innovation” component of this department is designed to ensure that the activities or unique initiatives of the Maine State Library are captured and documented in a manner that we can then use to provide information for other libraries across the state to model. In 2020, our Genealogy Reference Specialist found unique ways to deliver programs and services, our extensive move has allowed us to identify best demonstrated practices that we can offer for other libraries that may be required to move, and a Radio Frequency Identification project that will commence this spring will give ample opportunity to document successes and challenges that we can share with the field.

I share all of this as a way to tell you that our Public and Outreach Services – Research and Innovation department remains strong!

Library Development:

Our Library Development department is the key department associated with the “Making Libraries Stronger” component of our mission. The department receives its primary funding directly from the Institute of Museum and Library Services through the Library Services and Technology Act grants to state program, which is the only federal program exclusive to libraries (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.

When the pandemic began in late February and March, visiting libraries and in-person meetings were up-ended, and to this day are not occurring (yet). To that end, the Library Development

team put in place a vast series of virtual meetings and programs in order to deliver services. Since March 17, 2020 and through January 19, 2021 a total librarian attendance at our virtual meetings reached 6,522! 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 to say, our Library Development department not only survived – but thrived – in delivering essential services this past year!

Specific Stimulus Funding and Activities

The Maine State Library received \$121,462 in CARES ACT funds (directly from IMLS) to support library efforts in Maine through September 2021. This is how the funds have been spent:

Maine Contemporary Archives Collaborative (\$7,500)

The Maine Contemporary Archives Collaborative is a group of archivists, librarians, and other cultural heritage professionals working to actively document history through collecting, sharing, and preserving the stories of our community members in a variety of digital formats (documents, audio files, photos, videos, etc.)

This collaborative was formed in April 2020 when the Maine State Library funded the Omeka online platform. The collaborative is an effort to support one another while developing local projects to document life in Maine during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The collaborative represents libraries and communities from across the state--academic and public, urban and rural. We recognize the importance of sustaining community archives and expect this collaborative to continue beyond the current COVID-19 collection efforts and focus into the future.

A new web site is in development that will point to all individual archives from DigitalMaine.org. MSL now maintains a [hub page](#) for the project for now.

Zoom - Pro subscription licenses and training (\$17,500)

Utilizing NetworkMaine's discounted Zoom Pro subscriptions for schools and libraries, MSL fully subsidized over 130 library accounts for 2 years to support library virtual efforts. MSL also provided both technical (MSL staff) and virtual facilitation training (contract with Maine Humanities Council) for participating libraries.

This enabled the creation of the [Statewide Library Virtual Events Calendar](#) where libraries can post virtual events that are open to anyone in Maine.

Beanstack – two-year subscription (\$60,000)

[Beanstack](#) is an online reading challenge program that can be used for summer reading and for year-round reading challenges to keep all ages of readers engaged outside the library walls. Over 120 libraries in Maine signed up to offer this virtual reading program, each with its own dedicated website. MSL's Children's Literacy Specialist has worked with libraries to troubleshoot and fine tune websites and create Maine specific reading challenges.

Download Library (\$5,000)

Purchase additional e-books and audiobooks to meet increased demand due to the pandemic

Interlibrary Loan Supplies (\$6,500)

Additional totes and bags were needed to restart ILL services in July to accommodate the many books held in the vendor sorting facilities and at libraries.

STACAP [State Cap] (\$4859)

The remaining funds of **\$20,318** will be used for libraries that have had large PPE or retrofitting costs that have had severe budget cuts – or for additional costs for ILL delivery due to hazard pay increases.

Challenges

- **Budgetary:** The Maine State Library is extremely fortunate to be 'flat funded' as provided in the Governor's proposed FY22-23 Budget. The agency fully understands the financial

challenges that are ahead, and we'll find ways to adjust. That said, that does not mean that the challenges are not real. Two examples provide context for budgetary challenges facing the Maine State Library:

- **Digital and Online Content:** Costs to subscriptions are rising. A minimum of 4% cost increases had to be absorbed 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.
- **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.
- **Library Move:** The Department of Administrative and Financial Affairs (DAFS) and the facilities management department have been instrumental in assisting with the move of the Maine State Library. The library will reside temporary locations for roughly the next 24 months. The library's public operation will reside at 242 State Street, and the majority of the library's collections will reside at a warehouse location in Winthrop (again – housing 7 miles of shelved materials). To date the we are optimistic and pleased with how the move is going, and we are excited and energized to reopen to the public, albeit on a smaller scale. Our challenges exist by finding new and unique ways to deliver service, develop processes for retrieving materials at an offsite location, and providing public programs in a safe manner. Certainly, ensuring the Cultural Building is abated of asbestos, has upgraded mechanical systems, and if possible, upgrades to the building envelope are of most interest, and the current work plan being developed by DAFS and the agency-occupants of the Cultural Building addresses these items.

Thank you for your time today, and I'd be happy to respond to any questions.

Additional Items

The Maine State Library has a new logo! To align the library's logo with design elements of some other state agency logos, we have developed the below logo. Including the Dirigo Star represents our leadership role in Helping People, Making Libraries Stronger; and Transforming Information into Knowledge.



Testimonials: Below are some excerpts of thanks and testimonials that underscore the importance of Maine State Library services, and the dedicated work of the staff that delivery such services (some images from text formats sent to me by staff).

STEM Programming:



I absolutely love the stem videos that you are putting out. Are they available to share with students through a platform like google classroom? I am a teacher in Auburn.

I need to watch more of these. I missed your enthusiasm and anything I learn about science terms helps me in my conversations with my scientist friends. ;D Thanks for the cool lesson!

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Genealogy Reference:

“Thank you so much for an excellent presentation. I live near Bath, and am so excited to know of your interest in Scottish genealogy only records. I have done a great deal of the research on my family (McNie/MacNee - I see you have the many spelling issues with McGhees) from Stirling area and Port of Menteith. But I am kind of slow to get into the maps and deeper records. At some point soon I hope to be able to come up to Augusta and meet you in person and maybe get some guidance as to how to get into those records.”

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. “

Thank you,

Reference Services (provided digital scans and excerpts from Martha Ballard’s diary):

“Thank you so much for getting back to me and thanks for your help. I took your advice and borrowed it right away. My niece (age 9) and nephew (age 11) have been telling me how great this book is and they really wanted me to read it, so now I can let them know you made it possible. Thanks again.”

Reference Services (Obituary Research Request):

"I cannot thank you enough for your help.. I did find Julia 's obituary in the Lewiston Evening Journal July 17 1908...now I will tell you that I have been searching on and off for her record for the better part of 22 years.. And you provided the clue! I will now use this to complete my application to the Mayflower Society. You have no idea how grateful I am! I had no idea Google had a newspaper archives. I thought you should know what a difference you have made!"