



URBAN LIBRARIES ARE ESSENTIAL

The New Jersey Library Association advocates that all communities and elected officials fund urban public libraries at levels above the statutory minimum, which will allow these institutions to provide necessary and effective services for all residents of the state.

Economic environment

The economic difficulties of the past two years have been extremely challenging for all residents of New Jersey but particularly for those living in urban areas. High unemployment, reduced afterschool programs and limited technology access have all contributed to a decline in opportunities for urban residents. New Jersey's urban libraries provide essential services that residents need for survival and success.

Library response

Urban libraries provide a wide variety of resources and services that no other single institution can provide. As community anchors, these libraries provide: assistance in finding employment; access to government services; access to and assistance with technology; support for small business owners; a safe environment for children to read and learn; support for learners with indispensable resources critical to their success; and public programs for education, entertainment, and literacy.

Funding

Statutory minimum funding for libraries in New Jersey is based on local tax bases. Because these bases are limited in New Jersey's urban communities, cities have historically funded their urban libraries above the statutory minimum in order to enable these libraries to provide the essential services needed by their communities. State aid to cities ameliorated the funding burden. When state aid was cut, cities were forced to cut library funding to the statutory minimum. The results of inadequate library funding have been devastating: hours have been cut, libraries closed, staff eliminated, and books and online resources reduced.

Impact

Reductions in funding in cities like Camden, Trenton, Newark, and Jersey City are destroying the equal opportunity lifeline for those who are disadvantaged, poor, poorly educated, or newly arrived in this country. Urban libraries are a critical and essential governmental service that ensures equal access to information for all communities.

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