

From: Rachel Rosekind
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To: Nancy Skinner
California State Senate
State Capitol
Sacramento, CA 95814

12 June 2022

Subject: Support for \$750M Library Construction Grants Allocation in State Budget

Dear Senator Skinner,

Thank you for your sustained recognition of the critical role that our public libraries play in the lives of their communities and the residents who live there. As your constituent and a member of the Contra Costa County Library Commission, I am writing to express my support for the Senate Democrats' *"Putting California's Wealth to Work for a More Equitable Economy"*, and specifically the allocation of \$750 million for library infrastructure grants therein.

Public libraries are the threshold of radical possibility—not just in the books that are housed there, but in the buildings that house them and the ideas that underpin their institution: accessibility, education, critical inquiry, imagination, public engagement, and social enrichment. Community members deserve modernized, safe, accessible, and imaginative buildings that are blooming and brimming with courageous promise. Buildings that reflect the centrality, vibrancy, and aspirations of this communal symbol and space.

The Contra Costa County Library Commission supports equitable access to public libraries that are safe, technologically modern, and inviting for all people. These infrastructure funds would help us accomplish those goals. I represent a district that is home to five libraries that reflect variation and diversity in size, community demographics, technological capacity, and physical condition. What they do *not* vary in is their vital function as a hub for social cohesion, personal enrichment, and collective well-being. Two of my district's branches are in good stead, given that they were constructed within the last five years. But the other three require either renovation or relocation and reconstruction. In fact, my neighborhood branch, which is staffed by some of our county's most dedicated and hard-working professionals, is housed in a building that, while well-loved, is in dire need of repair, expansion/relocation, and renewed vision. A complete HVAC system, more space for staff and storage, more restrooms, lower shelves to meet ADA requirements, separate meeting and programming rooms, teen and maker spaces, private study areas, more public computers—these are just a few of the critical needs. And they *are* critical.

Climate change has produced greater and more frequent temperature extremes, exacerbating demand for spaces where community members can find shelter and relief. In order to function as warming or cooling centers, libraries need modern heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) systems. Sadly, many of our nation's libraries have aging infrastructure that merits extensive modernization. As public affairs, employment opportunities, and social services all tilt toward increasing digitization, vulnerable and lesser-resourced individuals are being left out and behind. Public libraries with modern computers,

printers, other hardware, and robust Internet access are no longer a supplement to physical collections; they are a direct pipeline to assistance, inspiration, civic affairs, social welfare, and education.

For all of these reasons and in service to these democratic aspirations, I urge you to support and work toward inclusion of \$750M for library construction grants in the State Budget. It is time to put the state's legendarily numerous billionaires' fortunes to work for the good of those whose backs it is built upon. We can and *must* do better. Thank you for your consideration.

Warmly,

Rachel Rosekind, PhD
District 1 Library Commissioner
Contra Costa County