

7 November 2022

Dear Congressman DeSaulnier,

As Contra Costa County's District 1 Library Commissioner and your constituent, I am writing to ask you to support the "*More Social Workers in Libraries Act*" (H.R. 8822), which represents a transformative and critical investment in the lives of our community members and the power of our libraries.

The Covid-19 pandemic has brought to the fore long-simmering issues and trends that have been building toward a crisis point over the past few decades: soaring wealth inequality; rampant mental health issues across age groups; a seismic shortage of affordable housing in U.S. metropolitan areas; rising homelessness, particularly unsheltered homelessness; critical educational achievement gaps and increasing racial and income segregation in public schools; severe misalignment between cost of living and average worker wages; and political and social polarization. All of these issues have two common factors: their critical urgency across diverse communities and the lack of societal capacity to address them. In this vacuum, public libraries have emerged as salient social service hubs, filling gaps that have widened so far that many can no longer see bridges between them.

Since their inception, public libraries have been hubs of community education, inspiration, enrichment, support, and participation. They have striven to keep pace with rapid societal changes while maintaining the more relaxed rhythms of neighborhoods and communities. Indeed, for many individuals in today's increasingly fragmented and difficult social landscape, their public libraries serve as a safe harbor from technological advancements, workforce developments, economic shifts, and demographic changes that have left them isolated, adrift, and at times profoundly disoriented and displaced.

In February of this year, a beloved unhoused community member and library patron was found dead from blunt force trauma in front of the El Cerrito Library, several blocks from my home. This was but one of our region's increasing deaths from exposure and a sober reflection of El Cerrito's lack of a homeless shelter and insufficient support for its unhoused population. *We can intervene proactively to prevent such tragic outcomes, and we can do so with innovative and collaborative synergy.*

The pressure on libraries to meet the vast spectrum of patron needs can seem overwhelming to both library staff and community partners. One of the most effective ways to address this is to pool resources and energies. Collaboration between libraries and partnering organizations enriches communities and bears the added benefit of creating meaningful relationships that can financially support libraries and emotionally support their staff. There are now more than 50 social worker-library partnerships across the country, with more in the pipeline. These programs have been overwhelming successes, and I invite you to read about their geographical range and impact in [this article in \*The New Social Worker\*](#). *There is no doubt that the residents of Contra Costa County would benefit from social workers strategically stationed at several of our 26 branches.*

No other public-serving and public-facing institution resources its communities more expansively, intentionally, and continuously as public libraries. Yet, like everyone, our libraries need help. The "*More Social Workers in Libraries*" Act can be a vehicle for sustained support and social uplift. I would be more than happy to meet with you to discuss the phenomenal work our dedicated County Library staff are doing and the *critical gaps* that they are struggling to meet. Thank you for your consideration.

Warmly, Rachel Rosekind, PhD