

June 23, 2020

Smyth County Board of Supervisors
121 Bagley Circle, Suite 100
Marion, VA 24354

Dear Chair Wyant and Supervisors:

In this moment when a community's access to accurate information is a matter of profound consequence, you can imagine our alarm when the Smyth County Board of Supervisors released its June 8 budget with \$0 funding for the Smyth County Library. We understand, however, that the Board of Supervisors does not intend to eliminate library funding; and, further, that it will maintain current funding levels. We want to express our appreciation to you for addressing the concerns of Smyth County residents, as well as those of the state and national library community, candidly and directly.


In case you require any affirmation of the wisdom of your decision, we would like to provide that. Beyond serving as cornerstones of vibrant communities—with access to informational, cultural, and recreational resources for residents of all ages and backgrounds—libraries are also a smart investment. In fact, studies across the country¹ show that the return on investment in public libraries is about \$5 for every \$1 allocated, with additional economic benefits to area businesses.

While these numbers are important, the human impact of that investment is the real story. In Smyth County, that investment improves school readiness for children and youth through early literacy activities, summer reading programs, homework support, and research assistance. It builds economic opportunity for job seekers, small businesses, and entrepreneurs through Internet access, skill-building workshops, and electronic and print resources that, for many, are otherwise unaffordable. It fosters community engagement through programs that bring together residents of different ages, interests, and backgrounds to listen, learn, and exchange ideas.

In uncertain times, demand for library services increases. Even when the facility was closed, Smyth County Library was open for business with digital resources, curbside service and online storytimes. And, now, as it reopens to the public, the library is critical to the infrastructure of a resilient community.

As association leaders who have had the privilege of visiting libraries in Virginia and across the United States, we know that no two libraries are alike but that successful libraries share something in common: a deep commitment and connection to the communities they serve. We know that, as elected officials, you share that commitment. We thank you for working with Smyth County Library, its staff, its trustees, and the community at large to ensure that your stewardship of the library's budget positions it to best serve Smyth County residents today and in the future.

Sincerely,


Wanda Brown, President
American Library Association


Jennifer Resor-Whicker, President
Virginia Library Association

¹ http://olc.org/wp-content/uploads/documents/post-id_2060/2016/04/Ohio-Public-Libraries-ROI-Report.pdf;
https://www.tsl.texas.gov/sites/default/files/public/tslac/pubs/ROI_Final.pdf;
<http://roi.info.florida.gov/Content/PDFs/Studies/Library%20ROI%202013.pdf>.