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United States Senate
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April 10, 2020

Mr. Crosby Kemper
Director
Institute of Museum and Library Services
955 L'Enfant Plaza North, SW, Suite 4000
Washington, D.C. 20024-2135

Dear Director Kemper:

Last month, Congress passed the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES) Act to respond to the health, economic, and social impacts of the coronavirus (COVID-19) on our states. The bill designates \$50 million in funding for the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), to prevent, prepare for, and respond to the impact of the coronavirus. As you work to implement this emergency funding, I urge you to consider the needs of communities facing difficulties accessing high-speed broadband.

The challenges imposed on businesses, families, and others from mandatory school closures and business interruptions are particularly difficult for those Americans who do not have access to reliable broadband in their homes. In Maine, an estimated 12 to 13 percent (83,000) of households still lack adequate access to broadband. Existing data also show that more than 5,300 of the state's 180,000 students lack the broadband access, creating challenges for those trying to work or learn remotely. Local libraries are often the only source of free Wi-Fi on Maine's rural communities. Seniors, homeless individuals, and students rely on libraries for access to essential services online.

The \$50 million that was designated to IMLS through the CARES Act can help to address connectivity issues in our communities. I encourage you to focus funding on libraries in rural and low-income areas to purchase mobile "hot spots" and associated connectivity, allowing impacted residents to check out these devices for home use during the coronavirus response. Libraries already use LSTA grants for similar activities, such as paying for Wi-Fi at local libraries or existing lending programs for hot spots, allowing users to check them out and libraries to track these items, maintaining accountability and good governance while bringing connectivity to homes that otherwise would be lacking.

Hot spots are inexpensive and easily deployable, and focusing funds on these devices will have a significant short-term impact. I urge you to use the tools at your disposal to help close the digital divide and provide temporary relief for rural and low-income residents. Thank you for your consideration of this request. If you require further details or information, please do not hesitate to contact me or have your staff contact [REDACTED]

Sincerely,



Susan M. Collins
United States Senator