

REPRESENTATIVE DAN ORTIZ

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August 28, 2024

Commissioner Deena M. Bishop, Ed.D.
Alaska Dept. of Education & Early Development
PO Box 110500
Juneau, AK 99811-0500

Dear Commissioner Bishop,

We are reaching out to bring your attention to and seek your assistance with the annual Public Library Assistance Grant from the State of Alaska. Historically, this grant has provided eligible public libraries with \$7,000 each year under AK Statute 14.56.300. These funds are crucial for purchasing books, supporting staff, and covering operational expenses, especially for many rural public libraries.

However, there has been unexpected and concerning news, indicating a drastic reduction in the grant. The initial amount of \$7,000 per library has been slashed to \$1,829, representing a significant 75% cut. What's more, the budget allocation within the Libraries, Archives, and Museums (LAM) Division has been reduced from over \$500,000 in previous years to a mere \$150,000 this year, without prior notice or explanation. Upon further inquiry, it has been revealed that the redirection of \$403,000 is a result of oversight and chargebacks within the division.

It is imperative to note that this substantial cutback cannot be absorbed by the rural libraries of Alaska. This decision has sparked widespread concern among librarians across the state, as the grant serves as a vital resource, once again, especially for rural libraries. We urgently seek clarification on the reasons behind this substantial reduction and hope to work collaboratively to find a resolution.

For many libraries, this grant constitutes a considerable portion of their annual budget, and its abrupt decrease will severely impact their ability to operate effectively and provide essential services to Alaskans. It is our earnest request to restore the funding for this grant to ensure these libraries continue to serve their patrons effectively.

Kindly respond to this request at your earliest convenience as we are eager to alleviate the concerns of our librarians as promptly as possible.

Respectfully,

Handwritten signature of Dan Ortiz in black ink.

Representative Dan Ortiz
House District 1

Handwritten signature of Rebecca Himschoot in black ink.

Representative Rebecca Himschoot
House District 2