

Alaska State Legislature

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Senate President Gary Stevens, Ph.D
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September 5, 2024

Deena Bishop Ed.D., Commissioner
Alaska Department of Education & Early Development (DEED)
PO Box 110500
Juneau, AK 99811-0500
*Delivered electronically

Dear Commissioner Bishop,

Thank you for your letter dated 9/3/24 stating that DEED will be working with the Division of Libraries, Archives, and Museums to identify additional funding for the Public Library Assistance (PLA) Grant program to bring their total grant payout to \$7,000 per eligible public library in FY25.

The PLA Grants provide vital funding for nine rural libraries in District C which I represent, and numerous others across the state. These libraries are an integral part of their community providing educational and recreational materials in a comfortable and safe setting for all citizens. These libraries also provide wi-fi and internet services that many in rural communities may have trouble accessing due to the lack of broadband in their area. Internet access assists students with attending college courses, business owners with filing paperwork online, and elders with access to medical care and benefits. Many rural libraries also host classes that support and enrich our local communities such as First Aid/CPR, educational and civic forums, and art and cultural activities.

Most of our rural libraries are run by dedicated volunteers with few or no paid employees. The PLA Grants provide necessary support for these small libraries to purchase new books, pay for internet services and computer equipment, and cover staff or utility costs. The amount of the Grants has remained stable for the last several decades at approximately \$7,000 per eligible library. When these libraries received notice that the grants would be reduced to \$1,829 per library, it definitely raised an alarm. I greatly appreciate your office working with the Division to identify additional funding to bring the total FY25 PLA Grant payout to \$7,000 for each eligible library. I look forward to following the progress on this effort with your office and the Division.

Thank you for your time and work on this critically important issue supporting our rural libraries through the PLA Grants. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Gary Stevens".

Sen. Gary Stevens
District C