

Nancy R. Robertson, State Librarian of Michigan  
Testimony before the Education House Appropriations Subcommittee  
March 13, 2012

Good afternoon. Thank you for the opportunity to highlight the activities and services of the Library of Michigan in partnership with Michigan's libraries.

Our flagship program is the Michigan eLibrary. Found at [www.mel.org](http://www.mel.org), it is Michigan's virtual, anytime, anywhere library, available to all residents from any library or from their home, church, school, office, vacation destination – anywhere they have a computer or other device connected to the Internet. You all know that Google is a simple and effective way to gather general information that is freely available on the Web. But when you need authoritative, trusted, and accurate information for building a business, checking on a medical question for a family member, finding information on how to re-tool a career or find and land a job, or working on coursework MeL can provide you with accurate information you can count on. Have you ever used the web to access a site for information only to find out it will cost you \$9.95 to actually look at an article? By contrast, the Library of Michigan purchases database information up front and provides free access to information resources so Michigan residents can obtain information without fees or surcharges of any kind.

The Michigan eLibrary:

You might wonder: How does MeL level the playing field for Michigan's residents?

- MeL provides access to published information resources at no charge.
- Any resident -- young, older; rich, poor; homeless, constantly traveling; business owner and entrepreneur -- has equal access to MeL's reliable and essential information.
- The return on investment statewide saves Michigan's public, school, academic, business, and other special libraries millions of dollars annually. These savings

enable them to purchase more specialized online resources specific to their own local needs than they could do before.

- For example, the LearningExpress Library database is a treasure trove of study and test preparation materials, including actual timed and graded practice tests. Michigan teachers, students, and parents can have free anytime, anywhere access to the ACT, SAT, GED, AP Subject and other tests. LearningExpress Library also includes vocational and licensing practice tests and tutorials that can ready Michigan residents for employment and new careers. The Jobs and Career Accelerator database in MeL includes resources for career planning and preparation, job-search, resume writing, and interviewing skills. If education and job training are roads to success, MeL is the vehicle that can help any Michigan resident succeed.

#### Leveraging State and Federal Dollars on Behalf of Michigan's Residents via MeL

The Library of Michigan makes the most of the federal and state taxpayer dollars annually appropriated in support of MeL.

- The current year return on investment figure for our annual expenditures on the entire suite of MeL Databases is \$21.80 of value to Michigan libraries and their constituents for every single dollar spent on MeL by the Library of Michigan.
- The last annual statistics show that the residents of Michigan performed over 35.5 million searches in the MeL Databases, demonstrating not only the fiscal value, but the real life value of the expenditure for Michigan's residents.
- The money spent on MeL also funds the Michigan eLibrary Catalog. MeLCat is the statewide resource sharing system that includes over 400 participating libraries. In the state fiscal year 2011, the catalog included over 45.5 million items. In one year alone, Michigan library patrons initiated over 1 million requests and picked up 956,000 items from all over the state at their own local libraries.
- This innovative statewide resource sharing system lets libraries focus their expenditures on those things they need to have locally, while their patrons have the benefit of access to millions of resources. At a conservatively average cost of

\$35 per item loaned, MeLCat resource sharing saved local libraries and local residents over \$33 million for the year.

- MeL also provides online resources for educators known as M.O.R.E. Through the M.O.R.E. portal, teachers, students, and parents can search online for tens of thousands of reliable and authenticated curriculum resources that are aligned to and searchable by the K-12 educational standards required by the State of Michigan.
- MeL also makes available electronic versions of local history primary resources, including photos, diaries, letters, and more. These treasures found in MeL Michigan are assembled from Michigan libraries and other institutions from around the state.

#### Need for Additional General Fund Support for MeL

- With the continuing reduction in federal Library Services and Technology Act funds annually distributed to states, the general fund dollars appropriated into the state's budget for MeL for this current year were essential to maintaining this statewide service for taxpayers.
- While budgetary constraints required a reduction in the number of MeL Databases purchased for MeL for the new three-year contracts, the \$950,000 new funding appropriated for this year allowed those reductions to be kept to a minimum. The on-going support of that funding in Fiscal Year 2013 will keep the current core set of MeL Databases available.
- The resources currently available in MeL help to ensure the success of all Michigan residents. However, we can do better. Some of the more significant gaps in coverage that could be closed with the \$800,000 included in the executive recommendation are:
  - a) An analytical and trend-tracking tool that would help small businesses grow and thrive (a service that likely runs in the neighborhood of \$800,000 per year);

- b) Or, a resource that offers online homework help 24 hours a day (which can cost between \$800,000 to \$1M annually);
  - c) Or, a searching tool that will optimize the success and retrieval rate of the millions of searches Michigan residents already make in MeL every year. (We anticipate this kind of discovery layer will cost at least \$200,000 annually.)
- Additions such as these will exponentially increase not only the practical value of MeL to the residents of the state; they will also expand the return on investment for MeL.

### Other Programs and Services of the Library of Michigan

While the Michigan eLibrary is by far our most high profile activity, the Library of Michigan also serves the state, its libraries, and its residents in many other ways. The past few years saw a significant decrease in funding and staffing for the state library. In spite of the challenges those decreases posed, we have become a more focused, more efficient, a stronger and more sustainable institution than we were before.

- The Library has 32 staff, down from the comparable 50+ that we had when I became state librarian in 2005.
- From FY09 to the FY10 budget, the state appropriation dedicated to the operations and staffing of the Library of Michigan dropped from \$6.15 million to \$4.6 million (over 1 ½ million dollars, more than a 25% cut).
- We met that cut by sustaining a 33% reduction in staffing.
- As a result, we redefined our core mission, and reassigned and restructured our staffing duties.

The collections the Library of Michigan continues to cultivate, preserve, and make accessible to the state's employees and its residents are:

- a) The Michigan Collection;
- b) The Michigan Documents Collection;

- c) The State Law Library;
  - d) The Rare Books Collection;
  - e) The Main (public policy-focused) Collection;
  - f) And Reference materials to support all of the core collections.
- These collections support our mission to preserve and keep accessible the published record of the state of Michigan and its people, and our commitment to serving the employees of all branches of state government with reference research services that ensure accurate, timely, and essential information for doing the business of the state.
  - Additionally, the Library of Michigan must collect and maintain the publications of the state. The Michigan Documents Collection includes the printed publications of the state, past and present, and we also capture the growing number of state publications issued electronically and via the Web.
  - This year we have undertaken an initiative to digitize key collections so they are both electronically available and searchable. Nearly 14,000 pages have been scanned to date, including the 1944 and 1954 Administrative Codes. This is but a start to an exciting and significant on-going project.
  - This past year the Library engaged in targeted outreach efforts to ensure that all state government employees know that the Library of Michigan and its staff are here to serve them in the conduct of their work. While our top priority is to serve state government, the public is welcome and encouraged to utilize the Library of Michigan's collections in the library itself. We also provide reference services for those whose research is focused specifically on our core special collections.

### Statewide Library Services

The Library of Michigan's Statewide Library Services is the division of the library dedicated to supporting the work of libraries around the state.

- We work with state's K-12 school libraries and with public libraries to define quality library service benchmarks and goals.

- We track and distribute the annually appropriated state aid to public libraries to the nearly 400 public libraries that serve Michigan's residents statewide.
- We provide certification of library directors and staff and offer required training sessions annually for new librarians, new library directors, and advanced library directors.
- To ensure that the directors of the smallest and most remote public libraries learn about new library service trends and opportunities for the communities they serve, we organize and host an every other year statewide Rural Libraries Conference.

### State Funding for Public Libraries

Michigan's public libraries are primarily locally funded. With those funds increasingly at risk, it is more important than ever to ensure that state resources continue to be allocated to the state's public libraries.

- The public library is the place where any Michigan resident can access online resources, including MeL, even when they cannot afford to purchase a computer or broadband access for their homes.
- The public library has staff and resources that help community residents and visitors find information on job and career development and business establishment or enhancement.
- The public library participates in statewide programs like the Library of Michigan's annual Michigan Reads! one-state, one-children's-book and the Michigan Notable Books programs, but it also provides year round literacy building opportunities for the members of its community:
  - a) Story times for children
  - b) Summer reading programs for children and teens
  - c) Teen centers as gathering places for after school hours
  - d) Tutoring opportunities for adults
- We need to ensure the sustainability of public libraries as a mainstay of Michigan's communities. Libraries are our partners in providing the benefits of

MeL to the residents of the state. They must contribute resources and staffing to participate in the MeL Catalog and to offer full functionality of all aspects of MeL. It makes sense for the state to help public libraries have the wherewithal to fully connect their community members with the essential resources the state has invested in.

Finally, public libraries, the libraries in our schools, colleges, and universities at all levels, and the libraries in our businesses, hospitals, and other professional institutions are all essential information providers. Their library staff are the qualified and trained experts in the use and identification of the information that the residents of the state of Michigan need to be successful in our knowledge-based culture and economy.