

Advocacy Letter

Dear Editor,

I'm writing to you as a member of the Pinellas Public Library Cooperative, an employee of the St. Petersburg Library System, and a fan of public library systems in general. The purpose of my writing is to remind our communities of the important role libraries play in society and of the often unmarketed value they provide.

Beyond merely lending books, today's public libraries are community centers that advance education, employment, entrepreneurship, engagement, and empowerment.

They provide essential access to information and technology during a time when digital disparities continue to affect families and communities across our nation. Through public computers, mobile internet hotspots, printing services, one-on-one technology support, and more, they serve as lifelines for residents who don't have access at home. Many public libraries also provide laptops for in-house use, allowing patrons to participate in virtual classes and proctored exams.

These resources are especially valuable for job seekers, who benefit from libraries in a variety of ways. Laptops and training resources support virtual meetings, job interviews, and skill-building opportunities that boost economic mobility. Moreover, small business owners and entrepreneurs rely on the free collaborative spaces and research tools libraries provide to help them launch and grow their ventures.

On top of that, kids and teens thrive through library learning programs. Early literacy initiatives build school readiness, while homework help, STEAM activities, and summer learning programs advance academics and provide social growth. This is especially important here in Florida, where we rank amongst the lowest in state reading and literacy levels.

Public libraries also serve us as free, safe, and inclusive gathering spaces where cultural events, educational programs, and community meeting rooms encourage civic engagement and social connection. From new immigrants looking to learn English and participate confidently in their new American life to seniors finding connection in sewing programs and book clubs, public libraries provide something for everyone.

A public library is a place for everyone and welcomes them without barriers, fees, or judgment. It's a place that enhances the quality of this life.

Although public library services are free to everyone, they require consistent investment to remain available. Investment that pays off in both intangible and financially tangible value. Investments in libraries deliver strong returns in education, economic opportunity, personal well-being, and civic engagement. Every dollar spent supports real people: students, job seekers, caregivers, entrepreneurs, and lifelong learners.

Unfortunately, despite their proven value, public libraries are often first on the chopping block during budget cuts. And reduced funding threatens more than just the number of books in a library; it destroys the programs and services that sustain our communities.

So, I ask residents, community leaders, and local partners to please recognize the library as the essential public resource it is. You have the choice to support your library and you can do so by borrowing books, attending programs, volunteering, contributing to Friends of the Library groups, and advocating for robust, sustainable funding at the city, state, and federal levels.

A public library is a place for us. A place for learning, for growth, and for many, a place where opportunity begins.

It's on us to make sure that doesn't end.

Thank you,

Peter Krauss