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## **H7335 - Rhode Island Library Association- in Support**

In recognition of the importance of public libraries in our society, the Rhode Island General Assembly passed legislation providing for state grant-in-aid for public library services. Rhode Island law (RIGL §29-6-2) establishes state aid for the support of local public library services to be equal to at least twenty-five percent (25%) of the amount appropriated and expended by the city or town from local tax revenues or funds from the public library's private endowment two years prior.

Unfortunately, the state has not consistently met the 25% funding level. The General Assembly fully funded state aid at the 25% level in FY23 and the Governor's budget included full funding in FY24. Prior to the past two years the state had not funded at the mandated 25% level since 2008. With years of level funding and only periodic infusions of additional funding, the state has regularly underfunded its obligations to our public libraries.

The Governor's proposed FY25 budget level funds state grant-in-aid to libraries, which will result in only 24.18% appropriated for each municipality. The Governor's FY25 budget also signals that state grant-in-aid to libraries is expected to be level-funded for the next five years; as a result, the percentage of state aid for local libraries relative to local municipal appropriations will continue to decrease over the next five years, placing more pressure on municipalities to increase funding for public libraries. This proposed underfunding for FY25 and future years will further increase a structural deficit in funding that supports our public libraries.

Our libraries are a vital part of the Rhode Island community and an important part of an informed society. The Constitution of the State of Rhode Island in Article XII, Section I, states that it "shall be the duty of the General Assembly to promote public schools and public libraries, and to adopt all means which it deems necessary and proper to secure to the people the advantages and opportunities of education and public library services."

All Rhode Island residents benefit from state aid to public libraries. Libraries use state aid:

1. To participate in the statewide public library consortium that provides critical technology services and that enables residents to borrow materials from any public library throughout the state.
2. To build strong print and digital collections to meet the needs and interests of their communities.

3. To provide access to computers, the Internet and Wi-Fi for those who don't have access to broadband at home.

There are 24 Rhode Island libraries that will experience a reduction in state grant-in-aid with level funding. The amount to fully fund state grant-in-aid, as well as the Statewide Reference Resource Center known as AskRI, is a modest \$380,114. Although a small number in the overall state budget, this is a significant amount of funding for our public libraries.

Submitted along with this document are resolutions from 14 city and town councils from across the state that are joining RILA in urging the General Assembly to fully fund our public libraries.

***The Rhode Island Library Association urges the General Assembly  
to fully fund state grant-in-aid to libraries.***