

## **Transcript: Libraries and Broadband: Panel One: WHAT'S WORKING**

**April 17, 2014**

DIRECTOR HILDRETH: Now, we're moving on to the program portion of our -- or the panel discussion of our program and I want to remind everybody that this hearing is being livecast and viewers are encouraged to submit questions via Twitter to @US\_IMLS. We also have some cards or paper on your chairs. If you have questions that you want to submit, we have a staff member perusing, will be picking up those questions. After each panel presentation, our Board members have some questions they'll be posing to the speakers, but we'll also have a chance for members of the audience and our virtual audience to pose some questions. So, here we go with our Panel Number One, What's Working. We're really looking at the vision, "What happens when we get it right?" We're going to explore innovative practices and partnerships and why investments in broadband make a difference. Our first speaker will be Chris Jowaisas, Senior Program Officer at the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. We were hoping to have Dionne Mack with us, Director of El Paso Public Library. She's done amazing things in El Paso. Unfortunately, she had a family emergency and wasn't able to be with us today. But we're excited also to have Clarence Anthony who's the Executive Director of the National League of Cities. So we'll start out with Chris. Would you like to come to the mic?

MR. JOWAISAS: Thank you, Director Hildreth and the National Museum and Library Services Board for holding this hearing. I appreciate the opportunity to talk about the experience that the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation has had with ensuring access to technology through public libraries and our vision of how libraries can utilize broadband to drive personal and community development. Today, the Gates Foundation is composed of many programs and initiatives from fighting diseases such as polio, malaria and tuberculosis to helping farmers in Africa strengthen their crops to improving the educational system in the United States. But it all started in 1997 with the Gates Library Foundation. Back then, only about 25 percent of public libraries offered public access to the internet and many inside the library community were not sure if this was a service that libraries needed to offer. Bill, Melinda and Bill Gates Sr. believe very strongly that access to information and technology was absolutely essential to allowing people to live healthy, productive lives, and they felt that public libraries were uniquely situated and the best places to provide such services. For a variety of reasons, they felt this but primarily because public libraries are free and open to the public, they have support within the community and most importantly, they have knowledgeable staff, staff who guide people through learning and access to information. In 1997, the Foundation set an ambitious goal. If you can reach a public library, you can reach the internet. By 2004, that goal was met. After investing \$240 million dollars, the U.S. Libraries program in conjunction with partners at the federal, state and local level helped to connect 99 percent of all U.S. public libraries to the internet. I still search to this day to find out where that one percent is. Our continued funding supporting public libraries in the U.S. reflects the belief that investments in public libraries benefit the community at large, as other speakers have mentioned, by ensuring that all people continue to have the opportunity to lead productive lives. While the original vision of the Foundation has been realized and all people now have access to technology through their libraries, it's time to turn our attention to a new vision, ensuring that people have access to all the opportunities that technology has to offer and that the opportunity divide does not increase. The Foundation believes that public

libraries are key components in meeting this new vision but face challenges in doing so. According to the 2011-2012 Public Library Funding and Technology Access Study, public computer and wifi use increased in the previous year at more 60 percent of public libraries. But it also found that more than 65 percent of libraries report that they don't have enough public computers to meet the demand and that 41 percent report that their internet connection speeds are insufficient. Meanwhile, public libraries are dealing with decreased or inadequate budgets. Twenty- three states reported cuts in state funding for public libraries in 2012 and more than 40 percent of states reported decreased public library support for three years in a row. Clearly, libraries have stepped in to address this new divide and people are looking to libraries to do just that. However, libraries do not have adequate resources to meet these expanding needs. Despite these continuing challenges related to funding, libraries have continued to move forward in addressing community development in many areas whether it's economic development, education or civic engagement or improving health and wellness. They do this through a variety of services such as helping people prepare resumes and apply for jobs, equipping them with digital literacy skills, showing them how to take action through e-government services or helping them find information that improves their health or the health of their loved ones. As libraries have stepped in to this role, people's needs and expectations have continued to grow. The opportunities evolve and libraries continue to strive to close that opportunity divide whether it's addressing the needs of immigrant communities, expanding learning opportunities for adults in informal or formal ways or supporting students through the provision of additional electronic resources. But to be in a position to accomplish this vision, public libraries must have the bandwidth to provide such services in an efficient and effective manner. Unfortunately, as we've heard, this is not always the case and it continues to be a challenge in many communities even after substantial and ongoing investments from local, state and federal programs to address getting robust connectivity to every library. Before libraries can fully explore these new services, they have to know that they're connectivity infrastructure is sufficient to handle experimentation and exploration without negatively impacting the access that people depend on on a daily basis. As online services evolve to include more video or other interactive media to deliver content, public libraries have struggled to provide the quality of service needed by their community when it comes to connectivity. Libraries often face this demand with consumer- grade connectivity infrastructure that does not easily scale and offers little to no quality of service guarantees. Essentially, libraries are often operating with one arm tied behind their back when it comes to connectivity. Broadband connectivity is the underlying bedrock for building a full suite of services for community and personal development. With a robust and reliable broadband connection, libraries and communities can move into more areas of exploration and innovation, people can move beyond being passive consumers of content to creating their own content which is where great personal and economic opportunity lives. As the Foundation assists the public library field through continued investments in meeting this vision, we hope to see more partners realize the power of the public library to assist personal and community development. The Foundation hopes that the network of supporters of this vision grows because we have seen and learned firsthand from investments in public libraries that they're key organizations for growing opportunity at the personal and community level. Thank you for this opportunity to share these comments.

DIRECTOR HILDRETH: Thank you, Chris.

(Applause)

DIRECTOR HILDRETH: All right. Now we're ready for Clarence. We're so excited that he could spend this time with us and managed to climb over these chairs today. Thank you, Clarence.

MR. ANTHONY: Thank you. You know, everyone in this room today has a story or a reason why you're here and you're committed to libraries and the impact on communities. You know, mine began when I was a migrant kid in Florida. Our family traveled all over America working in the fields but we were placed in Florida in the glades in Belle Glade, and we grew up in a community that did not have a library, did not have a stationary library. And so as an 8-9- year-old kid, I had choices to make. When that mobile library drove up to the park, I could either stay on the playground or I could go into that mobile library for the two hours that it was there. Most often, the playground won but I will tell you that eventually, I found my way into that library. Fifteen years later, I ran for public office in the city and the community in which I grew up and I had to deal with a number of issues: crime, drugs, housing but I knew that when I came back to my community from grad school that one of the things that I was going to advocate and fight for was to get a standing library in our community. And so I spoke to the legislators, the county commission for five years straight using the same speech. And in that fifth year, the chair of the state legislative committee staffer - - was a great staffer -- pulled out the exact speech and she read my speech out and said, "Will you guys please give this mayor a library." Well, we got it and three years after that, I was very blessed and honored at a very tender age at that time, '98, that they named that library the Clarence E. Anthony Library in South Bay, Florida. So why am I here? Because it is important. It made a difference in my life. I would not be here if it was not for that institution, that building, even that mobile library that was there for me to read about the places I could travel, the things that I could do as a migrant kid. Well, times have changed but libraries are still important and they're still significant. And the one fact that has not changed is the fact that the equalizer in America is education, the equalizer in America is education and an ability right now to connect to the internet and have computers in homes as well as in our libraries. The National League of Cities understands that fact and our political leaders nationally have made a commitment to education and advocate for legislation that will extend, expand the E-Rate Program funding, streamline the program and make sure that every American will have the ability to live that American Dream and have that access to internet as well as computers. We've also partnered with the Urban Libraries Council to assist in making sure any reforms that are developed in the E-Rate Program really provides the financial commitment that we did in 1996 in the Telecommunications Act. The \$2 billion dollars that we committed, it's not enough in 2014 to be able to deal with the issues that we have to deal with to deliver digital connectivity to Americans, especially those that are similarly most often left behind. The Chairman quoted Andrew Carnegie and I will as well. He stated, "A library outranks any other one thing a community can do to benefit its people. It's a never failing spring in the desert." So digital literacy is no longer a choice in American cities. High speed internet is essential for Americans to do everything, as we've heard, from finding work, gaining access to health coverage, and most of all, we must recognize it's important that if we're going to bridge the real economic and educational opportunities in America, people have to have access to the internet and computers. And it's also important to know that in the minority communities, that's where it is hurting most. For city leaders, we recognize that the minority community and the access to education is

important, the access to internet is important. And we as Americans, right now we're failing. So I don't make speeches just to make briefings and comments. I'm calling and asking for action to deal with these many issues. We know the importance of the program and we like to say the cities are the places where action occurs. And I'm not going to criticize Washington right now, but I can tell you mayor, city council members in towns and villages all over America, we're making things happen and we want to partner with you to make sure that things happen. So, as I close, I want to say that a call to action is needed around this issue. NLC is committed to working with the FCC, the ULC, Congress, the White House, ILMS. We're committed to working with everybody to make sure that we address this issue. We know that talk is easy but action is more important. We know that many families only see iPhones and iPads and computers in libraries such as this. We recognize that this is the place that people come and they travel around the world because they can read about places and read about professions and opportunities. Let's take the time to get the E-Rate modernization process right. Let's be creative and bold in our thinking to make sure our libraries have the technology infrastructure that they need to support a strong, local community that results in strong, national economy. My kids would be embarrassed as I say this but as Drake, the R&B singer said, I started from the bottom. Now I'm here and it's because of libraries. Thank you.

(Applause)

DIRECTOR HILDRETH: Thank you very much. That was terrific, both of you. So we have a couple of questions and if we have anything coming in on Twitter, just pass them off to me up here. But first of all, I'm going to start off and we don't have a lot of time so just some quick thoughts from both of you. What do you think community leaders, both city leaders and libraries, can do to promote digital literacy and a shared vision of broadband connectivity in their communities? So if Mr. Anthony was my mayor, I wouldn't have a problem but I don't know that all our mayors, and there are great ones out there, are at the place where Mr. Anthony is. So what do you think, gentlemen? What can your city leaders or your library leaders do to drive this message home?

MR. JOWAISAS: I think from the library perspective, one of the first things that library leaders can do is make sure that the city leaders get inside the library. I think oftentimes it's been a while since some of the leaders have actually been in a library to see the changes that have happened and also understand the demand. I think that's -- if you have connectivity at home, it's hard to understand what a huge role that plays in your daily life until it's taken away or until it's missing. And for people who don't have that at home, understanding what that means for them is an important thing. So letting the leaders actually see it and articulating what it is that the library's doing to meet those digital literacy needs I think is very important.

DIRECTOR HILDRETH: Thank you.

MR. ANTHONY: Yeah. I agree with Chris. As a former mayor, you know, you really do have a lot of issues you deal with and I would encourage, as you are doing, for the librarians and the library community to become stronger advocates. You have to fight for that space to make sure that public leaders know that we recognize that it's important, because if you don't have an educated population and economic

development, jobs, recruitment of companies -- libraries are central part of all of that connectivity but you have to tell your story of why it's important or it gets lost in the regular infrastructure of the cities including pipes, water and sewer. We can't see those things. Sometimes the library is invisible in communities. We have to make it more visible.

DIRECTOR HILDRETH: That is a great comment and as I always say, I think libraries are -- sadly, we are never in the front of anyone's mind. When you bring us up as a service or an option or a consideration, everybody's like, "Oh, yeah, why didn't I think of the library?" But we're never at the top of the mind and that's -- we have to get there. So Carla, did you have a question for our panel here?

MEMBER HAYDEN: Well, I have a question for both and especially hearing about cities. And to start with that, as a librarian in a thriving city and growing city, Baltimore, and a former resident of Chicago, why should cities really care about broadband and if you had to articulate that, because I'm going to use what you say, and why is it important in cities in particular with so much going on to provide the public access? And then as one of the first recipients of the Gates Foundation's grants in a city, you're continuing commitment to broadband and technology access and why is that still important to the Gates Foundation?

MR. ANTHONY: I think -- I talked a little bit about it earlier but the reason why it's important is right now, it is very competitive. Cities are competing against each other to recruit companies, to recruit younger folks into the community. And if they don't have that infrastructure, they're not going to be the great American city that they would like to be. And in a lot of ways, cities right now are celebrating their ability to bring broadband and internet and all kinds of access, and they show that as a valuable resource to recruit companies. They don't show the part where there is that population left behind. So the reason why cities are getting in this space and identifying it as important part of their community is because it's about tax bases, it's about jobs, it's about improving the lives of people who live in those communities. And right now, I don't think that we, as Americans, have reached into the depths of where we need to bring everyone up and to have that access. My dream is to have a 100 percent internet wide broadband city. I mean that everybody would have access to it whether you're sitting in a park or not. And I've challenged the broadband community to try to find a pilot city that we can actually make that city --

MEMBER HAYDEN: Baltimore.

MR. ANTHONY: I'll tell Mayor Rawlings- Blake that you said that.

DIRECTOR HILDRETH: Carla's volunteering Baltimore. All right, Carla. So, a quick question for you, Chris, not to put you on the spot but here you go. What would it take to get more funders like Gates to support libraries and digital literacy? Any ideas?

MR. JOWAISAS: Well, you don't have to convince us.

DIRECTOR HILDRETH: Right.

MR. JOWAISAS: We're continuing to make that and I think if people could see -- I mean in 1997 -- I actually installed computers here in this library in 1998. The demand is still the same now as it was then. The opportunities, the skills that people need have changed and libraries continue to meet that. I think to convince more funders to come along, I think again, it goes back to that point tying it to those funders' desires. If you want to understand economic development, whether it's at a city level, whether it's a private foundation that's going to fund that, tying it to educational goals, whatever their aims are. Libraries are already doing that work. That's the amazing thing about libraries. And they're not just doing it. They're doing it well. So I think from that point of view, again, it goes back to just telling our story and telling our story very effectively and in a compelling manner. I think, you know, again, as people talk about that personal relationship that they often have with libraries, I think just growing that network and building that network of supporters.

DIRECTOR HILDRETH: That was a terrific answer and what I heard was that libraries are doing so many different things all over the country, locally, at the state and regional level and we need to package those services to meet the priorities of some funders. A really good example is a great partnership that IMLS with the McArthur Foundation to support digital media labs. We've funded 24 all over the country. And digital media literacy is great for our teens. That's our target audience. And also, we're giving those young people skills to get jobs once they -- you know, once they go beyond high school. So think about all the things we do and package it to really meet the needs of the funder. So I want to have a round of applause for our Panel One and ask Panel Two to join us. Thank you, gentlemen.

(Applause)