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## Library Services and Construction Act: Joint Hearing (April 11, 1989): Speech 01

Arthur Curley

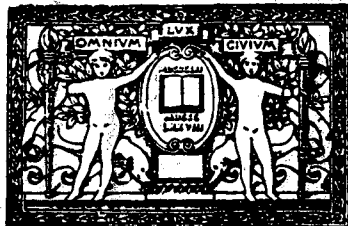
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# Boston Public Library

Boston, Massachusetts 02117

Arthur Curley  
*Director and Librarian*

**Testimony by Arthur Curley**  
**Senate Subcommittee on Education, Arts and Humanities**  
**House Subcommittee on Postsecondary Education**  
**April 11, 1989**

In recent years the programs of the Library Services and Construction Act have provided the financial backbone for public libraries. Through LSCA programs, public libraries have made great forward strides in the areas of service, construction, and interlibrary resource sharing. As director of the Boston Public Library, I can attest to LSCA's critical importance to my own institution: \$719,000 in LSCA funding was a part of the multiple-source package that has enabled Boston Public Library to cooperate with five other public libraries in establishing the Metro-Boston Library Network, an automated resource-sharing cooperative. Members of our public will soon have easy access to information about the circulating collections of all six libraries (over 3 million volumes) and the ability to borrow any of the libraries' materials with equal ease.

Grants totalling \$95,000 from LSCA have made it possible for the Boston Public Library to open an Access Center at the main library for people with disabilities, providing special assistance in meeting their library and information needs. Special equipment and materials for library patrons with visual, hearing, and physical disabilities have been acquired, including a Kurzweil reading machine, a Visual-Tek electronic magnifier, TDD's (telephone typewriters), a computerized voice synthesizer, page turners, and more.

Innovative technology, formats, and materials tailored to the needs of the disabled, and professional staff trained to provide assistance are now in place in great measure because of LSCA and its high priority placed on services to the disabled.

I can also speak for the importance of LSCA funding to smaller libraries across the country. I urge Congress to reauthorize LSCA and to continue existing programs. In addition, I hope you will support a technical amendment establishing a new program to fund the area of preservation. Such a program is vitally needed to counteract the disintegration of paper which threatens to destroy all library collections.

The way in which people view the physical condition of library collections has changed radically in recent years. Old books were once thought to be indestructible; new ones expendable and replacable. In recent years surveys of collections in major research institutions such as The Library of Congress have revealed that approximately 40% of their collections are too fragile to use. Lack of interest in the physical condition of library materials has been replaced by legitimate fear for their long-term survival.

Because of the permanent value and the magnitude of their collections, most research libraries and major urban public libraries have initiated steps to tackle the problem of preservation. Small and medium-sized public libraries have thus far assumed a less aggressive role in this area. There are many reasons for this: coordination on a regional level has generally been absent; funding has been limited; expertise has been lacking. Yet, preservation problems affect all library collections.

Steps to counteract the deterioration of collections in public libraries must include:

- o educating librarians in preservation principles and procedures;
- o improving environmental conditions in library buildings, thus slowing the deterioration of paper;
- o insuring security of collections from water, fire, and theft;
- o providing better physical storage and support for collections;
- o instituting practices to minimize damage from handling;
- o taking necessary measures for disaster preparedness;
- o using good quality materials and instituting safe book repair procedures;
- o microfilming fragile materials.

I support the March 20, 1989 recommendation of the Chief Officers of State Library Agencies to establish a Title III-B of LSCA. This would authorize a preservation cooperation program in which state library agencies would work with libraries, archives, historical societies, scholarly organizations, and other agencies in planning, education and training, coordinating, outreach and public information, and service programs to ensure that endangered library and information resources are preserved for future generations. Title III-B would complement the interlibrary cooperation and resource sharing already underway in Title III and would build upon the work of the Library of Congress and the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Thank you.