

Dear Editor,

I am writing this letter in the hope you will help me raise awareness of and funding for our public libraries. Public Libraries provide multiple resources, services, and programs to our communities. Literacy skills is one of these services. Literacy is an essential skill of the population and without it, participation within society becomes challenging. With advances in technology, it is now more important than ever to teach our citizens literacy skills including early literacy for children, adult literacy, digital literacy, health literacy, and information literacy to create a more informed society. The American Library Association (ALA) provides support to libraries to help adults and children develop literacy skills. This support is in programs geared toward not only the ability to read, interpret, and comprehend written word, but to also use technology, English language classes and language support, and to understand information of all types to be used within a local, national, and global society. Funding for libraries is necessary to continue these essential services.

The United States has lower literacy rates than many other countries (ranked #51 in the world), and additionally, Florida's literacy rates are among the lowest in the country at 76.3% (<https://wiservoter.com>). Public libraries are acutely involved in literacy skills to help increase this statistic. One component of the Florida Library Association's (FLA) Funding Initiatives is addressing literacy services which include: children learning to read earlier, adults learning to read for the first time, inspiring and nurturing the love of reading, and providing training and resources to increase financial and digital literacy. Pinellas County specifically has multiple programs which address literacy. The Pinellas Public Library Cooperative (PPLC) is a 14-member municipal library cooperative which provides shared resources within the 14 libraries, in addition to providing services to unincorporated areas of the county. The PPLC supports literacy by providing resources and services such as Deaf Literacy Center, Reading with the Rays Program, and NetSmart Kidz online access. Individual libraries as well have literacy programs such as a High School Diploma Program, Learning English for non-English speakers, Deaf Literacy Programs, Literacy grammar, Technology classes for adults and children, Children Story Times, Makerspaces, Book Clubs, and many other resources and programs.

Literacy is an essential skill needed for citizens to be able to participate and advance society. Literacy is not just reading, writing, and comprehension of written words, but also interpreting information, using technology, and applying information to a global society. Pew Research Center study in December 2013 found that 95% of Americans (age 16 and older) stated public libraries "are important because they promote literacy and a love of reading" (<https://pewresearch.org>.) Continuing funding to public libraries is necessary to provide these services, which are free of charge to attend. We are fortunate to have increased budget support for the PPLC for 2024. As the cost of living and prices in general rise, we as citizens must reach out to our federal, state, and local legislators to express our views on the benefits of public libraries within our communities, particularly to increase literacy. To maintain these benefits, continued and increased funding is essential. I urge you all to advocate for and support your public libraries. Innovative ways to advocate is included on the American Library Association Advocacy Website (listed below), through the Florida Library Association (website listed), or through your local legislators. We must continue to act for our community, our children, and our democratic society.

American Library Association. *Advocacy; Literacy*. <https://www.ala.org/advocacy/literacy>.

Florida Library Association. *Advocacy Action Center*. <https://www.flalib.org/advocacy-action-center>.

Pew Research Center. *How Americans Value Public Libraries in Their Communities*.
<https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2013/12/11/libraries-in-communities/>

Wise Voter. *Literacy Rates by Country*. <https://wisevoter.com/country-rankings/literacy-rate-by-country/>.