

STATEMENT OF JAMES WELBOURNE
DIRECTOR, NEW HAVEN FREE LIBRARY, CONNECTICUT
BEFORE THE HOUSE ENERGY AND COMMERCE COMMITTEE,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON TELECOMMUNICATIONS
AND THE INTERNET
NOVEMBER 19, 2003

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

My name is James Welbourne. I represent the American Library Association (ALA) and am the Director of the New Haven Free Public Library in New Haven, Connecticut.

Today's libraries are dynamic, modern community centers for learning, gathering information, and entertainment. The New Haven Free Public Library is proud of the many community-based activities we offer our citizens --from book groups and author talks to infant and toddler literacy resources, to technology access and job training. Information has become the great equalizer in today's society, and libraries play an increasingly critical role in leveling the playing field by providing communities with no-fee access to technology and information resources. DO IT would allow libraries to bring technology and information resources to an even greater population in both urban and rural communities across the country.

A chain is only as strong as it's weakest link and DO IT would be another important link in building a strong chain to close the Digital Divide and to meet our Nation's Digital Opportunities. Coupled with programs such as the E-rate and the Library Services and Technology Act as well as other local, state and national programs, we can provide equitable and affordable access. We need all these links to meet the need for accessibility for all.

At the New Haven Public Library, funds from this trust could be used to help establish a Technology Development Fund, which would support the tri-

annual replacement of library personal computers. Funds could extend Technology Access Centers (TAC) to remote community-based locations such as public housing centers, youth development organizations, and police substations; and funds could go to updating hardware and software accessories and providing critical technology support services to the public and library staff. We are the first resort for homework assistance by young people using the Internet and CD-ROM technology; we provide local businesses with remote access to electronic databases and commercial information services, and we provide health information and online consumer health advice through our electronic Health Information Network. In each of our neighborhood branch libraries, citizens not only have access to the Internet and e-mail, but are also offered skills training on Word Processing, Spreadsheet applications, World Wide Web searching, Internet, and Computer Basics. These services have proved critical to average citizens trying to keep current with the demands of a technology driven society.

These scenarios envision linking institutions together to benefit both the city and its citizens. These are the types of advanced networking opportunities the DO IT fund can provide for cities like New Haven as well as for rural communities where, with new technologies, even the most geographically isolated patrons could be participants in a collaborative virtual environment they would otherwise be unable to afford.

TESTIMONY OF JAMES WELBOURNE

Good Morning Mr. Chairman and Members of the subcommittee.

My name is James Welbourne. I represent the American Library Association (ALA) and am the Director of the New Haven Free Public Library in New Haven, Connecticut. I am very pleased to be here to speak in favor of the Digital Opportunity Investment Trust, or "DO IT."

The American Library Association is the oldest and largest library association in the world. Among its 65,000 members are public, academic, and school librarians, library trustees, members of the library business community and friends of libraries. Today, there are more than 124,000 libraries in the United States. In addition to public libraries in almost every community, there are thousands of libraries in schools, colleges and universities, hospitals, law firms, businesses, the armed forces and more. Because libraries offer free access to information for all, they bring opportunity to all.

Today's libraries are dynamic, modern community centers for learning, gathering information, and entertainment. The New Haven Free Public Library is proud of the many community-based activities we offer our citizens --from book groups and author talks to infant and toddler literacy resources, to technology access and job training. Information has become the great equalizer in today's society, and libraries play an increasingly critical role in leveling the playing field by providing communities with no-fee access to technology and information resources. DO IT would allow libraries to bring technology and information

resources to an even greater population in both urban and rural communities across the country.

A chain is only as strong as its weakest link and DO IT would be another important link in building a strong chain to close the Digital Divide and to meet our Nation's Digital Opportunities. Coupled with programs such as the E-rate and the Library Services and Technology Act as well as other local, state and national programs, we can provide equitable and affordable access. We need all these links to meet the need for accessibility for all.

Modeled after Abraham Lincoln's Land Grant Colleges Act, which authorized the sale and use of public lands to support the establishment of public colleges and universities, DO IT would create an education trust fund by using the billions of dollars in revenue from auctions of unused, publicly-owned telecommunications spectrum. The trust fund would support research and development of new educational models and prototypes, taking full advantage of the Internet and other new digital telecommunications technologies. It would support a more robust Internet where people can find tools for job training and retraining, for education training, and more.

At the New Haven Public Library, funds from this trust could be used to help establish a Technology Development Fund, which would support the tri-annual replacement of library personal computers. Funds could extend Technology Access Centers (TAC) to remote community-based locations such as public housing centers, youth development organizations, and police sub-

stations; and funds could go to updating hardware and software accessories and providing critical technology support services to the public and library staff.

The trust fund would enhance public participation in civic activities and could be used to invest in new technologies and promote lifelong learning.

The American Library Association is working to ensure that libraries take the lead in providing equitable access to library services and materials for everyone regardless of age, ethnicity, physical ability, income, language, geographic location or the type of library they are using. Both rural and urban libraries face barriers to providing equitable services because of both geographical and technological barriers. School, college, and university libraries struggle not only with providing basic access to students, but also with the need to provide skill-building and training opportunities for staff. DO IT funds would provide opportunities to enhance staff development and training, break down geographic barriers to access, and promote new educational opportunities.

As Director of the New Haven Free Public Library, I oversee a library system that serves a resident population of 123,000, and a daily commuting population averaging around 72,000 individuals. In my system, technology is regularly used to help out-of-work adults search for new sources of employment; provide the tools and expertise needed by job seekers in developing effective resumes or preparing for occupational testing. We are the first resort for

homework assistance by young people using the Internet and CD-ROM technology; we provide local businesses with remote access to electronic databases and commercial information services, and we provide health information and online consumer health advice through our electronic Health Information Network. In each of our neighborhood branch libraries, citizens not only have access to the Internet and e-mail, but are also offered skills training on Word Processing, Spreadsheet applications, World Wide Web searching, Internet, and Computer Basics. These services have proved critical to average citizens trying to keep current with the demands of a technology driven society.

Imagine a scenario where the hospitals and medical systems in the city use a network to share MRI images over the Internet while also videocasting views from surgery. Or imagine researchers, located at various geographical sites, using the system to hold a videoconference to discuss the latest research on genetically modified organisms where computer generated models are viewed at all sites simultaneously.

At the same time, a student studying a foreign language connects with a class in Europe learning English. "Listening in" at the nearest local library branch is the student's instructor -- there to assist in the learning process. Or, a student travels to the local library and logs on to the library's computer to access an online tutor with whom she works in real time, manipulating computer generated images in order to complete the student's report.

These scenarios envision linking institutions together to benefit both the city and its citizens. These are the types of advanced networking opportunities the DO IT fund can provide for cities like New Haven as well as for rural communities where, with new technologies, even the most geographically isolated patrons could be participants in a collaborative virtual environment they would otherwise be unable to afford.

DO IT can also provide the means for libraries to digitize special collections. Many libraries, like the one at Yale University, have unique collections and materials that should be accessible to the general public via the Internet. With new capabilities, patrons will be able to view interactive, 3-D versions of each item in the special collection without having to travel outside of their own community. A student could visit the Library of Congress from any state in the country and be able to virtually walk through the doors of the Library into the Great Hall, to page through the Gutenberg Bible, and to graph the maps in the Hammond Collection.

Many scenarios are possible with investment in research and with the development of new tools, systems, and content based on digital technologies. DO IT will leverage the use of private funds in pursuit of new information technology developments in the public interest. It will stimulate ideas and models designed to enhance the use of technology for teaching and learning. If we are

all connected to resources and linked together in a collaborative environment, we can erase digital divide issues, bring down virtual and physical barriers, and unify public and private institutions, businesses, government and citizens.

I would like to thank the Chairman and Members of the subcommittee for presenting me the opportunity to speak with you today. I would also like to thank the National Science Foundation for their generous grants to support workshops and research into collaborative opportunities for libraries in advanced networking.