

Libraries Play Key Role in Transforming and Keeping Delaware Connected

The Honorable Bethany Hall-Long, PhD, RNC, FAAN

Lieutenant Governor, State of Delaware; Professor, Nursing and Joint Faculty, Urban Affairs, University of Delaware; Chair, Behavioral Health Consortium; Chair, National Lieutenant Governors Association; National Co-Chair, Million Women Mentors

Emergency departments, family care practices, walk-in clinics. We are all familiar with these more traditional sites to access both health care and associated resources. As a public health nurse, I have seen over the years how different populations, especially our most vulnerable, do not always access to these traditional sites. People experiencing these challenges often lack any form of health care. As Lt. Governor, I have the opportunity of working with diverse stakeholders and community members from Blades to Brandywine to improve health outcomes for all Delawareans. That is why I am so proud of the work of the Division of Libraries and the role they play in expanding access to critical health and public assistance resources.

It is no secret the critical role libraries play in each of our towns and cities across the State. These community hubs not only provide educational and literacy tools to people but have been tasked in expanding their services in recent years. This means libraries are doing more, like processing passports, embedding social workers, implementing summer reading programs, advancing STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics), and expanding arts offerings. As a university professor, I've had the opportunity to also work with the libraries as we collaborate with the Delaware Medical Reserve Corps and provide information on disaster preparedness. They even play a key role in our disaster planning acting as "second responders" in our recovery efforts as we try to restore a sense of normalcy after these events. These programs and activities transcend the historic and traditional understanding of what libraries do and what services they provide.

All too often, those we are trying to reach with needed resources are faced with transportation and other challenges, making it difficult to serve them. That's why we've connected the services we offer with the folks who utilize them, by going out into their communities. My office, in coordination with the Division of Libraries, set up pop up table events at libraries throughout Delaware. By going directly into these communities, we are able to engage with the citizens and address their concerns and needs, and to hear about the services they utilize at our libraries. For instance, at the Seaford Public Library, our staff engaged a lady who was seeking assistance so that she could purchase healthier foods for her family. My office was able to work with one of the onsite social workers to connect and secure a Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) voucher. She was able to seamlessly apply and enroll in this program because of the services provided by the State's pilot program that strategically placed social workers in a community setting and, by extension, increase access to critical public health resources.

There are countless examples of how libraries play a larger role in our state's public health strategy. One of the most pressing issues, despite the global pandemic, is the opioid epidemic. For the past three years, I have been the Chair of the Behavioral Health Consortium. This working group created the road map to curb our State's fatal overdose rate. Our statewide library system has been on the front line of this epidemic. Through critical community partnerships, the libraries have been integral in Naloxone Points of Distribution (POD). These PODs have ensured

countless doses of life saving, overdose reversing medication found their way into family's hands. This resource alone can be attributed to saving thousands of Delawareans who continue to battle the chronic disease that is addiction.

Libraries are also taking a more active role in engaging the community and encouraging broader participation in the 2020 Census. As Chair of the Governor's Complete Count Commission, it is our goal to make sure we count every single Delawarean. This number is tied to critical funding Delaware receives from the federal government. These funds go toward a variety of services, ranging from transportation, education and even healthcare dollars, to name a few. The more accurate and complete the count, the more adequate our federal funding levels become. Our libraries have been helping educate and promote the importance of completing the census, all while continuing to provide resources for individuals who might struggle with access to broadband or other technology.

Libraries across our State are the foundations to so many of our critical interactions. Whether it be reading and learning or using the expanded services offered by our libraries, these services positively impact Delawareans. It's also so uplifting to see that, despite a global pandemic, the libraries continue to operate. This continued commitment to the community is a true testament to the enduring spirit and sense of community libraries provide. It is clear that many of the services and strong community engagement our library system provides ensure a stronger, healthier Delaware.

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