

# From the President

*“Advocacy isn’t something extra we do on top of our work; it is our work.”*

Greetings from what is currently a very cold and snowy, central part of our wonderful state. I am Lara Luck, the Collection Development Supervisor at the Forsyth County Public Library, and I am honored to be the North Carolina Library Association’s president for the 2025-2027 biennium. I have worked in libraries for almost 30 years now and have been a member of NCLA for 25 of those years. In that time there has been a great deal of change in our profession. However, I think we can all agree that the changes and challenges we are undergoing now have us at a crossroads, and the actions we take now may affect our profession for decades to come.

In recent years, North Carolina libraries have been subjected to growing legislative scrutiny. Bills that threaten the professional integrity of librarians, including potential criminal penalties for distributing “harmful” materials and mandates for community review committees, are creating an atmosphere of fear and self-censorship. These legislative measures jeopardize the free flow of information, a core principle of our democracy. Libraries are more than just places for books; they are spaces for open dialogue, diverse perspectives, and inclusive education. We must stand against the unnerving effects of censorship and protect access to all ideas.

Libraries are also facing severe financial challenges, from the attempts to cut federal funding through the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) to local budget crises that impact staffing and hours of operation. The breakdown of regional library systems and closing of libraries isolates North Carolina communities from the resources and local information they come to rely on.

North Carolina libraries are often the lifeline for vulnerable populations, including those experiencing homelessness, low-income families, and non-English speakers. Libraries provide access to critical services like free internet, job application assistance, and community health programs. However, these popula-



tions continually face obstacles like transportation barriers and the lack of support to manage mental health, exacerbating what we know as the digital divide.

Librarians across North Carolina are facing personal challenges as well. The toll of understaffing, burnout, and the hostile political environment is undeniable. Our librarians and library staff are dedicated to serving their communities, but we are increasingly doing so with fewer resources and under immense pressure. In addition to our traditional roles, many librarians are stepping into social service positions, responding to crises, and managing rising security concerns. The mental and emotional strain this creates is leading to an alarming rate of burnout across our profession.

We need to find ways to encourage lawmakers, community leaders, and citizens of North Carolina to recognize the critical role libraries play in our society and take action to support them. The North Carolina Library Association stands united in the fight to:

- **Defend intellectual freedom:** Libraries must remain safe spaces for exploring diverse ideas without fear of censorship. We must oppose legislative measures that put librarians at risk of criminal liability and create a climate of fear in our schools and libraries.

- **Ensure adequate funding:** Libraries need sustained investment to continue serving our communities effectively. Federal, state, and local governments need to be convinced to prioritize funding for our libraries, ensuring that libraries have the resources to continue our critical work.
- **Support library staff:** Library workers must be treated as the professionals we are. This includes fair wages, adequate staffing, and comprehensive training to handle the evolving needs of our communities, from mental health crises to technology access. Libraries cannot function without the dedication and expertise of our staff.
- **Advocate for vulnerable communities:** Libraries are a crucial safety net for those in need. We must continue to find innovative ways to serve all members of our communities, regardless of their socioeconomic status.
- **Work for greater inclusivity:** Libraries must continue to serve as inclusive spaces where everyone - regardless of their background, identity, or beliefs - can find support, education, and resources. We must bridge gaps in language access, digital literacy, and cultural sensitivity to ensure that no one is left behind.

I invite all North Carolinians to stand with libraries. Here's how you can support our efforts:

- **Advocate for libraries:** Contact your state and local representatives to express your support for libraries and oppose harmful legislative measures that threaten intellectual freedom and access to resources.
- **Volunteer and support your library:** Libraries depend on community involvement. Whether through volunteering your time or supporting fun-

draising efforts, your local library needs your help now more than ever.

- **Join NCLA:** Become a member of the North Carolina Library Association to stay informed and participate in advocacy efforts to protect and strengthen libraries across the state.

Advocacy isn't something extra we do on top of our work; it is our work. Every time we help someone navigate information, protect their privacy, learn a new skill, or feel welcome in our space, we are demonstrating our value. Advocacy is just making that value visible to the people who make decisions.

Many of us didn't come into librarianship to lobby or persuade. We came to serve. But service alone isn't enough if others don't understand what libraries actually do, or what's at risk when support erodes. If we don't tell our story, someone else will. Quiet advocacy happens in everyday moments: when you explain the impact of a program to a community partner; when you share a patron success story with a library stakeholder; when you correct a misconception about libraries being "quiet places with books."

Those are the moments that can make the most difference. As library workers, you are trusted messengers. People believe you. They listen to you. And that trust is one of our strongest advocacy tools.

Libraries are an investment in the future, an investment in education, community, and the values that bind us together. Now is the time to protect them. Together, we can ensure that libraries remain beacons of hope, learning, and freedom for generations to come.

Thank you for the work you do, and for being advocates whether you realize it or not.



Image generated by ChatGPT (2026)