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ALA American Library Association

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UNESCO
City of Literature Program

Dear UNESCO Selection Committee:

The American Library Association (ALA) heartily endorses the application of Seattle, Washington, to become a designated UNESCO City of Literature. As President of the ALA with a national perspective on the role of the library in fostering a culture of literacy, I can affirm the very positive impact that the Seattle library community has had on the cultural, literary, and educational vitality of Seattle.

Involvement of Seattle community members in public library system planning and support has been strong. A large bond issue was passed in 1998 to fund revitalization of the entire public library system; that support has remained strong to this day. Nearly 33,000 Seattle residents provided input to the development of a strategic plan in 2011. A tax levy proposal was crafted in 2012 to focus on four priority areas for the community: more open hours, more books and materials, improved computer and online services, and maintenance of buildings. By unanimous approval, the Mayor and City Council presented the levy proposal to Seattle residents, who passed the tax levy to provide \$17 million annually for operating funds.

The strong support by Seattle residents for their public libraries is an indicator of the powerful impact that library programs and services have had. One literary program, called "If All of Seattle Read the Same Book," was started at the Seattle Public Library in 1998 by librarian Nancy Pearl. In this program (now called "Seattle Reads"), the whole community reads the same book and participates in a citywide book club. This idea has proven so popular and engaging that it has spread into communities throughout the United States and beyond.

The nurturing of reading, writing, and a culture of literacy by the public libraries of Seattle has taken on a multi-faceted life for all ages: author programs; Raising a Reader book bag program; Battle of the Books: A Global Reading Challenge Program; story times in five different languages; functional/practical skill classes for adults (e.g., job skills, English as a Second Language, citizenship); Summer Reading (the 96th year); a newly designed learning-based summer program which started in 2014; and Do-It-Yourself (DIY) programs for youth.

The library community in Seattle involves all types of libraries as well as the University of Washington Information School. The libraries in both the University of Washington and Seattle University have transformed their facilities in the last three years. The highly respected Information School, with its strong library education program, has created a synergy throughout the Seattle librarian community that emphasizes the teaching of patrons to analyze and evaluate information. School libraries have had their services bolstered by their partnership with the public library in terms of the collection and bibliographic instruction.

The network of libraries in Seattle is made even stronger by the cultural fabric of the city. Museums, bookstores, literary nonprofits, and a robust author community collaborate with libraries to surround the citizens with opportunities to read, learn, discover and write together. My conversations with Seattle residents have been sprinkled with their obvious pride and true appreciation for their environment of literacy and cultural vitality.

I hope you will approve Seattle as a UNESCO City of Literature. The city will add much to the network of Cities of Literature and will benefit greatly from the international conversations and cultural exchanges.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Courtney L. Young". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Courtney L. Young
President, American Library Association