



New Jersey Library Association Statement on ALA's President's Program at Midwinter 2016

The New Jersey Library Association wishes to express its dismay that the 2016 ALA Midwinter Conference's President's Program will feature Cory Booker, a United States Senator from New Jersey. In the program description ALA says: "Prepare to be inspired when rising United States Senator Cory Booker—known for being innovative, and widely recognized as the accessible and energetic new voice of politics—joins President Sari Feldman as speaker on the President's Program, in partnership with the ALA Task Force on Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion..."

In New Jersey we have seen Cory Booker's brand of inspiration and its impact on libraries. During his tenure as Mayor of Newark, NJ - our largest city where 1/3 of the population lives below the poverty line - funding for the Newark Public Library was severely cut. Three of 10 branches were permanently closed during this time. Hours were reduced at all remaining branches and at the main library. Staff was forced to endure a 40% pay cut for more than 15 weeks in 2010. While many other city employees also endured furloughs, none were impacted as severely as the library employees. During these dark days of the city's budget crisis Mayor Booker made choices about what was important to Newark. As a result, some departments were not cut at all and some received increased funding. But while other departments endured cuts as well, none were cut as severely as the library. Historically, in times of economic distress, library services are used extensively in urban communities, but Mayor Booker turned a blind eye to the vital services offered by the Newark Public Library.

Today the Newark Public Library is slowly rebuilding its services and staff from the devastating impact of the "Booker years". The New Jersey Library Association questions what inspiration Senator Booker has to offer the national library community. While we would not have encouraged the invitation to Senator Booker, we urge ALA President Sari Feldman to use this opportunity to educate and, perhaps, inspire the Senator with a look at what libraries truly have to offer. Perhaps next time ALA seeks a mayor to speak to us we'll reach out to Philadelphia Mayor Michael Nutter who has acknowledged the budget cuts he made to the Free Library of Philadelphia were the worst mistake of his tenure in office and has since worked to restore funding.

Adopted by the NJLA Executive Board Nov. 23, 2015