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DATE: October 19, 2022

TO: Joint Budget Oversight Committee

FROM: Merodie A. Hancock, PhD, President of Thomas Edison State University 

SUBJECT: New Jersey Library Construction Bond Act, P.L. 2017, c. 149 – Recommendation and Request for Approval of Reallocation of Certain Grant Funds

The New Jersey Library Construction Bond Act (P.L. 2017, c. 149) (the “Bond Act”) was approved by New Jersey voters on November 7, 2017 and authorized the issuance of \$125,000,000 in general obligation bonds for the purpose of the construction, reconstruction, development, extension, improvement and furnishing of New Jersey’s public libraries. On October 10, 2019, the State Librarian, with the approval of the President of Thomas Edison State University (the “President”), adopted regulations necessary to implement the provisions of the Bond Act. The regulations are set forth in N.J.A.C. 15:24 -1.1 through - 6.1 (the “Regulations”). There have been two solicitations for grant applications related to the Bond Act funds—one in Winter 2020 and one in Spring 2021. The first round of funding of the Bond Act approved projects totaling \$86,484,040. The second round of funding of the Bond Act approved projects totaling \$37,174,636.71.

Under the Bond Act, “[a]ll appropriations from the “New Jersey Library Construction Fund” shall be by specific allocation for each project, and any transfer of any funds so appropriated shall require the approval of the Joint Budget Oversight Committee, or its successor.” Additionally, the Regulations specify, at N.J.A.C. 15:24-6.1 (j):

“The President, with the approval of the Joint Budget Oversight [Committee], may, in a manner consistent with the allocations provided in the Bond Act, allocate any balance in an approved grant to another eligible library; a new solicitation for grant applications; an amended application; or toward a library’s larger project, if the approved project was only for a portion of a larger library construction project.

1. If an applicant determines not to undertake a proposed project for which a grant was awarded;
2. To adjust for actual project expenses in a manner consistent with the approved grant; or
3. If an applicant fails to comply with the provisions of the grant.”

I am writing today to request approval of the reallocation of \$1,764,447, appropriated by the New Jersey State Legislature from the New Jersey Library Construction Fund during the second round of funding on January 12, 2022, by P.L. 2021, Chapter 370, to the Newark Public Library for a small project titled "Foundational Repairs to Create the New Charles F. Cummings NJ Information Center." The Newark Public Library has determined it is not able to undertake the approved project as the City of Newark has indicated its intent to sell the building at which the proposed project was sited.

My recommendation is that the \$1,764,447 originally approved and appropriated be reallocated to two projects which were submitted for consideration during the application period for the second round of funding but were not awarded grants due to limited funding availability. Both libraries were deemed eligible to receive grants under the Bond Act:

1. \$1,426,673 to the Newark Public Library in Newark, Essex County. Title: "Main Branch Renovations and Modernization to Meet Community Needs." This project will create the consolidated New Jersey Hispanic Research Information Center (NJHRIC). The NJHRIC is both a statewide, research-level collection of materials relating to the historical and cultural experience, achievements and contributions of New Jersey's Hispanic community and a trusted resource among the immigrant community that addresses specific needs relating to legal, social and civic life. In addition, the project relocates and reconstructs the Victoria Technology Center to improve wayfinding and accessibility for patrons, constructs new, modern public bathrooms on the first floor, and modernizes two public access elevators that are over 50 years old.
2. \$247,361 to the Glen Ridge Public Library in Glen Ridge, Essex County. Title: "Barrier-Free and Expanded Access of the Historic Glen Ridge Public Library." The project aims to rectify several facility inadequacies and access to critical library services that do not currently exist. The project doubles bathroom access and relocates the technical services office, enabling its current area to be rehabilitated and used for both the construction of a small study room, and with the addition of movable stacks enables the creation of flexible programming spaces.

The balance of \$90,413 will be reallocated at a later date.

Please advise if I can provide any additional information to aid in your decision-making process.