
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Griswold Memorial Library receives \$10,000 Building Capacity Grant

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Colrain, Mass. - The Griswold Memorial Library (GML) in Colrain is one of 16 libraries to receive a \$10,000 Building Library Capacity Grant from the American Library Association (ALA). The Griswold Memorial Library will use the funds to continue and expand their partnership with the Franklin County Sheriff's Office, Belding Memorial Library in Ashfield, Greenfield Public Library, and the Eric Carle Museum.

The ALA Building Library Capacity Grants are supported through a three-year grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and are intended to bolster library operations and services including literacy and other skill development, developing collections, staffing, expanding outreach, as well as maintaining and amplifying existing service strategies or adding new ones to make an impact. The official awards letter can be viewed at <https://www.ala.org/news/2024/05/ala-awards-10000-grants-16-libraries-serving-incarcerated-persons-or-assisting-those>

The Griswold Memorial Library and Belding Memorial Library have been providing library services to patrons in two units at the Franklin County Jail since 2021, including book lending and book club discussions, and "Read to the Children," a program that enables incarcerated caregivers to record a video of themselves reading a picture book and share that video with their loved ones. In 2024, the Griswold Memorial Library, Belding Memorial Library, and Greenfield Public Library began offering outreach services at the Franklin County Re-entry Service Center.

"Public libraries are a critical link in the network of services that help people to stay out of trouble and to improve their lives, and thereby keep our community safe. We hear often how reading and using the library helps patrons who have experienced incarceration to reconnect with their families and get back on their feet," said Chelsea Jordan-Makely, the Library Director at the Griswold Memorial Library.

The ALA's "Prisoners' Right to Read" states that "information and ideas available outside the prison are essential to people who are incarcerated for a successful transition to freedom. Learning to thrive in a free society requires access to a wide range of knowledge. Suppression of ideas does not prepare people of any age who are incarcerated for life in a free society."

Since 2013, the jail population has grown 27 percent in rural counties, according to the Vera Institute. Each year, at least 70,000 different people are booked into local jails in Massachusetts, according to the Prison Policy Institute, which also reports that about half of all people who are incarcerated are parents or caregivers.

"We are thrilled to continue and expand our outreach at our local jail," said Sarah Hertel-Fernandez, the Director of the Belding Memorial Library. "We want to make sure our neighbors know that public libraries are here to support them during and after incarceration, while advocating for top-down changes in library policies to make sure that's true across the state."

The Griswold Memorial Library is a 2024 recipient of the National Medal for Library Services from the Institute of Museum and Library Services, the highest honor awarded to libraries. The library's mission is to provide tools, resources, and services to support the enjoyment of reading and the informational, educational, and communication needs of the public.