



**Joint Legislative Budget Hearing
January 29, 2013**

Good afternoon and thank you for providing me the opportunity to present today regarding state funding for libraries and library systems.

I would like to begin by thanking Governor Cuomo for maintaining the previous year's funding levels in the 2013-14 Executive Budget. I would also like to thank all those members of the Legislature who supported our legislative priorities last year.

Libraries are an essential part of every community; they provide access to free, unbiased information, they serve as educational institutions, they present a bridge to cross the 'digital divide', they deliver workforce development, and they act as a focal point in the community, hosting countless community groups and events.

Libraries are Education

Libraries are educational institutions, delivering learning opportunities at every stage of life. Parents introduce their children to books and foster a love of reading beginning with 'lap-sit' story time programs that serve to develop early literacy skills. From elementary through high school, librarians provide instruction that fosters critical thinking and information analysis to prepare students for college and career readiness. Libraries continue to serve a crucial role in higher education, fueling research and providing navigation to an unending stream of information. Following formal education, libraries continue to serve the needs of the public, addressing human curiosity and hunger for information.

Libraries are Information

Libraries serve essential portals to the increasingly important world of digital information. Many New Yorkers do not have a computer or internet access at home. Can you imagine not being able to apply for a job because only online applications are accepted, or not being able to look up information on a diagnosis that the doctor just gave to a family member? That is the reality for one third of minority households in New York State, and for 67% of homes with annual income below \$20,000. Public libraries bridge this 'digital divide', by providing access to this technology. Seventy-two point five percent (72.5%) of New York's public libraries are the only free source of Internet access in their communities and are key components of New York's information infrastructure.

Libraries are Jobs

In recent years libraries have also expanded their role, serving as workforce development, career training and job placement centers. Public library have no shortage of success stories of various patrons who participated in English as a second language classes, gained basic computer skills, returned to school and earned their GED, found employment, or even started a small business, all thanks to the services provided at the library.

Libraries are Critical Infrastructure

Following Superstorm Sandy New York's libraries were key in delivering needed support to devastated communities. Many libraries were open within hours of the passing of the storm, providing shelter and coordinating aid with other emergency response personnel. The Queens Public Library reports that in the first week after Sandy, they distributed 9,000 meals, 6,000 coats, 1,500 blankets and thousands of care packages. In the aftermath of the storm, libraries were overrun with community members seeking electricity to charge their cell phones and a place to access the internet. Libraries are well established as a cornerstone of the communities they serve, and their response to Superstorm Sandy was no exception.

Libraries are Efficient

Governor Cuomo has spoken to the need for local governments to cooperate, collaborate, and share resources to achieve greater efficiency and economies of scale. For over fifty years, New York's Library Systems have served as a model of governmental cooperation and efficiency. Library Aid, in large part, supports our state's library systems; and library systems enable individual libraries to provide access to materials and service that they could never afford on their own. This is accomplished through sharing services, sharing resources and collections, and conducting cooperative purchasing. Perhaps the most widely recognized service delivered by our library systems is the infrastructure that makes inter-library loan material sharing possible.

Usage is Up

Although positive steps were taken last year, library funding is still down nearly 20% from its peak in 2007 – at a time when library use is up 12% and circulation is up over 21%.

In a 2012 survey of 284 public libraries (that's about 37% of the libraries in New York State), in just one day:

- There were over 170,000 patron visits, (of them, nearly 40K of them used a public computer)
- Over 24,000 reference questions were answered,
- Over 13,000 children took part in a program, and
- Over 340,000 items were circulated

These numbers illustrate that contrary to those who claim that the internet is making libraries irrelevant, library usage and circulation continue to rise.

Libraries Need Your Support

Currently New York State Library Aid is at \$81.6 million below where it was sixteen years ago in 1997. This diminished funding comes at a time when library usage and demand for services are up. Libraries have long been role models for shared services, but they have tightened their budgets and increased efficiencies to the breaking point. In order to maintain the critical information infrastructure that NY's libraries provide, Library Aid, as stipulated in education law (\$102 million based on the 2010 Census - which is) must be provided.

No other state funded service serves so many people for so few dollars. Even if fully funded to \$102 million, Library Aid would amount to less than 1/10 of 1% of the NYS Budget; and yet the libraries and library systems that this funding supports serve over 14 million New Yorkers.

Your constituents overwhelmingly support their libraries; over the past three years, on average, 97% of library budgets have been approved by the voters. I hope that you will support libraries as well by voting in favor of full funding restoration.

Beyond all the numbers and statistics, at the end of the day this is a matter of what type of society we all want to live in. Libraries make for better communities, a better informed public, bridge the 'digital divide' and support the functioning of democracy. I for one, want to live in a world where libraries are viewed to be just as essential as police and fire departments in the community. Every one of you has come here to Albany to serve the interests of your community and the state. Supporting library funding is an investment in New York's economic recovery, an investment in New York's educational and cultural infrastructure, an investment in New York's citizens, and an investment that will produce a substantial return and make a lasting positive difference for New York State.

Libraries are essential.

Libraries are education.

Libraries are information.

Libraries are jobs.

Libraries are efficient.

Fully fund Library Aid to \$102 Million.

Respectfully Submitted,
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