



Joint Legislative Budget Hearing  
January 23, 2012

Good morning and thank you for letting me speak to you today about state funding for libraries and library systems.

I first want to thank Governor Cuomo for not reducing our funding in the Executive Budget. I especially want to thank Senator Hugh Farley for persuading the Senate to establish the Select Committee on Libraries with an outstanding 19 members volunteering to serve on it. And I also want to especially thank Assemblymember Bob Reilly for having the courage to hold a hearing by the Assembly Library Committee back in November on library funding and particularly what the Assembly could do for the library community. And finally I want to thank all those members of the Legislature who voted for our seven legislative priorities last year of which three were signed into law.

However, despite all these recent positive steps, the fact is library funding is still down 23% from 2007 – at a time when library use is up 11%. Library Aid is currently at \$79 million, which is less than when I started this job eight years ago. If you look at the chart that accompanies my testimony, you will see that we are back at 1994 levels of funding. No other educational institutions are funded at 1994 levels, not schools, not colleges, not BOCES, so why are libraries?

Libraries are educational institutions, chartered by the Board of Regents, administered by the state Education Department, receive state funding and local support and serve the educational needs of their communities just like schools do – and even beyond what schools do -- and yet time after time, we are the last to receive funding increases and the first to receive cuts, and disproportionate cuts at that. What the library community wants is parity, equity, fairness, call it what you will, we want to be treated the same as schools, the state courts have already recognized libraries as educational institutions, the time has come for the Legislature and Governor to follow suit.

The library community has always been reasonable and flexible with our requests, we have never asked for more than the state can realistically provide. Our needs are small, so small that the amount of Library Aid in the budget is less than one tenth of one percent of the entire state budget. Libraries are in our communities, in our schools and on our college campuses. Libraries are with us at every point in our pursuit of life-long learning. If you combine the 10 million public library cardholders, with the 3 million k-12 students served by school libraries, and the 1.4 million college students served by college libraries, libraries serve approximately 75% of the state's population. No other state supported service serves so many people for so few dollars.

The New York Library Association commissioned a poll with the Siena Research Institute two weeks ago and their survey of registered voters showed that 71% supported giving libraries the same state aid increases as schools. I mean in percentages and not in real dollars, which means a very modest \$3 million more in 2012-13, which would bring Library Aid back up to \$82 million, which is still less than the amount libraries were getting in 2004 when George Pataki was Governor.

Also according to the Siena poll, 24% of respondents had someone in their household use the resources at the library to apply for a job, search for a new career or improve their employment skills

in the past twelve months. In a Siena poll conducted over the summer, they found 57% of New York household have experienced at least some type of job loss or dislocation (reduced hours, etc) and based on the new data at least 42% of those households facing job search needs have in the last year used a library as part of their search. Bottom line, a large percentage of unemployed or underemployed are using libraries to look for jobs.

Libraries have been providing this “safety net” for the unemployed with no help from the state. In fact, as I stated at the beginning, the state has actually cut library aid 23% since the economic crisis began. Well, we can’t continue much longer to provide these needed services – not if all we have are 1994 dollars. We need your help now.

In addition to helping the unemployed during these difficult economic times, average families are using libraries in greater numbers. The amount of items borrowed by your constituents has risen from 136 million in 2004 to 165 million in 2010 an 18% increase. Visitation to libraries increased from 107 million in 2004 to 117 million in 2010 a 9% increase. And those numbers are telling in that circulation of materials increased at twice the rate of visits to libraries, which means more library users are taking advantage of downloadable materials (like ebooks) from library websites.

When your constituents get to vote on local library funding, they do so in overwhelming numbers, with 97% of library budgets being approved over the last three years, which is an outstanding approval rate given the tough economic times we have been through.

The library community knows times are time tough and the economy is in flux and state finances are fragile. But that is why you should be supporting libraries, because during tough economic times libraries are used even more. The numbers don’t lie, whether, its polling data, circulation numbers, or budget passage rates. New Yorkers, your constituents use and support libraries, and you should as well, especially since it takes very little effort and resources to satisfy our needs.

I have also included in my written testimony a list of legislative action items from my presentation to the Assembly Library Committee in November.

1. Going forward recognize libraries as educational institutions and tie percentage increases in Library Aid with School Aid.
2. Exempt public libraries from the MTA payroll tax like public and private schools are now.
3. Allow libraries to access other sources of state funding like Adult Literacy Education (ALE), Employment Preparation Education (EPE), Universal Pre-K and Workforce Development funds that can support the services and programs that libraries are providing in their communities.
4. Support the passage of legislation that allows libraries to partner with other governmental entities like BOCES to provide internet access, or that provide flexibility in procurement practices and in the allocation of library aid.
5. Broadband access and high-speed internet connections are essential not only to our libraries and other community anchor institutions, but to the viability of our economy. Since libraries are a key provider of community internet access, a stable funding stream through a state Universal Service Fund should be created that supports broadband deployment, high speed access to libraries and schools, and digital literacy efforts to bridge the digital divide and expand the number of digitally literate New Yorkers.
6. According to the state Library there is approximately \$2.5 billion in library construction and renovation needs throughout the state and yet the state provides only \$14 million annually for public library construction funds. A modest increase to \$20 million would be welcome.

