



### Senate Budget Hearing on Proposed Mid-Year Cuts

Good morning and thank you for letting me speak to you today about the proposed mid-year cuts to the 2009-10 State Budget and its impact on library services around the state.

The Governor's proposed mid-year budget cuts include a 10% or \$3.375 million reduction in Library Aid. This proposed cut is on top of the \$8 million cut back in April and two cuts in 2008 that totaled \$3 million. So in the space of less than 20 months, funding for libraries and library systems has dropped from \$102 million to \$91 million. If the Governor's proposed additional cuts are approved, funding would drop to \$88 million or 1998 levels, and with inflation factored in the funding would only be worth \$66 million in today's dollars.

In addition, these state cuts will result in a corresponding loss of almost \$2.3 million in federal aid that is used to fund innovative and cost-sharing programs at libraries and to fund the NOVEL databases that are used by all types of libraries and which saves them approximately \$87 million a year through statewide licensing of these valuable information tools, that are used by students, researchers, and businesses.

Libraries are supported and appreciated by your constituents. More importantly, voters have put their money where their mouths and hearts are by overwhelmingly approving their local library budgets. Attached to my testimony is a chart provided by the NYS Library that shows that over the past three years, on average 97% of library budgets have been approved by the voters.

The proposed reductions in funding for library services, come at a time when library usage is at historic highs. With the downturn in the economy, library usage has skyrocketed by double digits, and this phenomenon has been documented by almost every media outlet in the country from the Wall Street Journal to USA Today to NBC's Evening News. During tough economic times, people flock to libraries to save money, to improve their literacy and computer skills, to look for employment opportunities, to access public assistance programs, and even to pay their taxes.

According to a study funded by the Gates Foundation, 73% of libraries serve as a community's only option for free internet access, and that number rises to 82% in rural areas. So if you don't have a computer or internet access at home -- and according to the U.S. Census Bureau 38% of Americans still do not have internet access at home, you rely on the library for free internet access.

If you are unemployed and 874,300 New Yorkers are unemployed as of September 2009, which means 38% of the unemployed or 332,234 or more are depending on libraries for internet access. Why is this important, because 75% of all job listings are online and at least 60% of companies only accept employment applications online.

Let me tell you a quick story that illustrates the role libraries are now playing. This happened in Brighton a suburb of Rochester. Matt is a middle aged gentleman who was appearing in the library first thing every day, heading right to the computers. One of the librarians noticed him struggling to use the computer and began helping him. It was clear he didn't have many computer skills. As the librarian helped Matt, he learned a little bit more about him.

Matt had lived in the town for years and had recently lost his manufacturing job. He had also just bought a new car. Matt admitted he had never used a computer before – he never had to -- but now he needed a job, and all the applications were online – and all required a resume.

Matt was asking for help so often, he said he felt embarrassed. But the librarians were all eager to assist. They worked with him on the basics of computer use and helped him craft a resume. Since the library offers computer classes, they encouraged him to sign up and learn even more. To that he said, "Thank you, but I'm going to get a job real soon now."

I can only hope Matt did get that job. But I do know that if he did, it was because of the help he found in the library. And if, instead, he is still looking, I know the library will still be there to help.

So why is New York State cutting funding for library services at a time when libraries, now more than ever, are needed by so many in our communities to survive and recover from this economic downturn. In a January 2009 survey NYLA conducted, 80% of libraries had helped a patron look or apply for a job, and that number has probably increased by now. Cutting library funding now makes as much sense as cutting financial assistance to the unemployed.

In addition, Library Aid also funds our library systems, (the BOCES for libraries) that serve as the backbone of our information infrastructure, they provide the cost-sharing, shared services and collaborative approach that save libraries and their taxpayers money. These proposed cuts would devastate the very mechanisms that make our libraries one of most cost-effective public services available in our communities, on our college campuses, and in our schools.

On one hand the state is promoting cost sharing, and collaborative endeavors by municipal governments and schools to save money, and on the other hand the state is punishing libraries for already having in place such cost effective structures to begin with.

In conclusion, during tough economic times, when the neediest among us are looking for help, now is not the time to be cutting the very services and assistance they need the most. Whether its food banks, job training programs, unemployment assistance or libraries, I believe it would be penny wise and pound foolish to cut the very services that are in the greatest demand and can do the most good to those in need.

