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Contacts:

Michael J. Borges, Executive Director
518-432-6952, ext. 101. director@nyla.org
or Kyle Kotary, 518-542-1988 (cell)

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Library Advocates Come to Albany to Rally Against 5th Round of State Cuts

(Albany, N.Y.) Nearly one thousand librarians and library supporters rallied at the State Capitol today against yet another round of State cuts. Several speakers unified the voices of thousands into a single message for the Governor and State Legislature: "Libraries are Essential and Funding is Critical."

"The New York Library Association is outraged by the continued cuts to New York's libraries, which are an essential part of our educational system, a focal point for many communities, and part of the very fabric of our society," stated Michael J. Borges, NYLA Executive Director.

The Governor's proposed 2010-2011 Executive Budget Governor includes an additional 2.76% or \$2.4 million cut in funding for New York's libraries that would drop Library Aid to \$84.45 million, which is below 1998 levels.

"I am hard pressed to name another part of the education budget that has been cut as many times in such a short period, or is asked to function at 1998 levels, or even less if you factor in inflation," said Mr. Borges.

Today library advocates filled Meeting Room 6 in the Empire State Plaza to voice their support for library funding and provide a visual demonstration of the library community's strength to legislators and their staffs. Various speakers included Author/Flutist Da Chen, Senator Hugh Farley, Assemblymember Barbara Lifton and New York City Councilman Vincent Gentile. Senator John Flanagan and Senator Liz Krueger also stopped by the rally.

Senator Hugh Farley, 44th Senate District, said that for the past three decades he has sponsored every piece of library legislation. "There is no more important function in education than our library system, which is the finest in the United States," said Senator Farley, a member of the Senate Minority Conference. "And my conference is one hundred percent behind restoring library aid."

"For me, this has been the best of times and the worst of times," said Assemblymember Barbara Lifton, Chair of the Committee on Libraries and Education Technology. "Libraries and books are so important and I'm happy to be leading the charge for libraries. But then it was the worst of times when we heard the state is broke and here we are in the worst recession since the great depression...and what are we to do? We need to support our libraries."

New York City Councilman Vincent Gentile, 43rd District Brooklyn, noted that the *New York Times* recently said that libraries were the big loser in this year's local and state budgets. "Did you ever think that you would hear that or see that in print? Libraries are non-political cultural institutions that benefit every resident in every neighborhood and now they're being described as the biggest loser when it comes to priorities set by our governments. Cutting funding for libraries is cutting funding for literacy, our culture, education, and for our community."

“Please don’t cut our libraries because it’s part of our American soul. It’s one of the things some other regions of the world and people do not have,” said distinguished author and flutist Da Chen.

NYLA also hosted an informal breakfast reception for legislators and staff to meet with library advocates from around the state. Legislators were given the opportunity to have their photos taken for the annual, and well-known, *READ* posters and bookmarks that are used to promote the Statewide Summer Reading Program.

Michael Borges also noted that library usage has soared as the economy has soured. More people use libraries to save on the family budget by using the free services at their libraries and the unemployed continue to use libraries to search and apply for jobs online.

Borges concluded: “Whether it’s food banks, job training programs, unemployment assistance or supporting our libraries, it would be penny wise and pound foolish to cut the very services that are now in the greatest demand and can do the most good to those in need.”

New York Libraries Are Essential Campaign

NYLA has also launched an online-based grassroots advocacy campaign which includes a Facebook page, online petition, photo contest, and more.

NYLA’s *SnapShotNY: A Day in the Life of a Library* initiative, similar to ones conducted in New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Illinois, documents in statistics, pictures, videos and user comments just how busy and essential libraries are to our communities.

Information on *SnapShotNY*, the *Libraries: Essential* Campaign, NYLA’s Facebook efforts, and the online petition can be found at: www.protectnylibraries.org.

About NYLA

The New York Library Association -- America’s first state library association -- was founded in 1890 to lead in the development, promotion and improvement of library and information services and the profession of librarianship to enhance learning, quality of life, and equal opportunity for all New Yorkers.

To learn more about the New York Library Association, please visit: www.nyla.org.

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