



Testimony on Deaccessioning Legislation (S. 4584/A.6959)

By Michael J. Borges, NYLA Executive Director

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The New York Library Association supports the need for libraries to have collection management policies that cover both the acquisition and deaccessioning of items from their library. According to a recent survey we conducted of libraries (see attached), 88% of libraries already have collection management policies. Of these libraries, 90% have policies covering the acquisition of materials and 81% have policies covering the deaccessioning of materials.

The fact that a clear majority of libraries already have such policies in place and the fact that Commissioner's Regulations 90.2 (see attached), entitled "Standards for registration of public, free association and Indian Libraries", already calls for libraries to have written policies and to periodically evaluate the effectiveness of the library's collection, would from our point of view undermine the need for such broad and unfunded mandates as stipulated in this legislation.

The implementation of this legislation would place a severe hardship in terms of both money and staff on libraries that are already underfunded and understaffed as a result of ongoing cuts at the state and local levels. The enormity of the stipulations that are outlined in this legislation are daunting for even the smallest library to comply with. According to the 2008 Annual Report from the NYS Library, there are over 222 million books in library collections throughout the state.

I am a trustee of the Guilderland Public Library in the suburbs of Albany. It is a typical medium sized library with 22,000 library cardholders out of a town population of 34,000. Our total collection is 64,000 items. In 2009, we removed 14,621 items from the collection and added 18,111 items. I can only imagine what larger libraries like Rochester, Buffalo and the three NYC libraries add and discard every month, let alone every year.

This is why several aspects of this legislation are either unworkable or redundant for libraries to comply with especially at a time of shrinking resources and reduced staffing. For example, Paragraph 4 of this legislation would require libraries to place on a registry all items added or weeded from its collections. Libraries or the library systems they belong to already have online catalogues of their collections that are readily accessible to the public. Publishing a second registry of items that are added or discarded from the collection is both time consuming and redundant. This legislation does not recognize that library collections are not static and given limited space and the addition of hundreds/thousands of new books each year, cannot hold onto books/materials that are no longer current or popular with patrons.

In Paragraph 10 of the legislation, it says the proceeds from the sale of a deaccessioned items can only be used to purchase another item for the collection and then says the proceeds cannot be used for traditional or customary operating expenses. For libraries, book/materials purchases are traditional or customary operating expenses. Secondly, many libraries donate their books to their Foundation or Friends groups to sell to raise money for the library's operations or for the purchase of new equipment, etc. The decisions for spending this money should not be dictated by state legislation, but should be left in the hands of the local community.

In addition, many libraries, including college and special libraries, have items that are not currently catalogued or are in special collections not open to the public. This legislation would require them to spend extra staff time and money entering these items into their catalogues or registry as stipulated in this bill.

In conclusion, we welcome the opportunity to work with the sponsors of this legislation and the NYS Board of Regents to clarify existing Commissioner's regulations as they pertain to collection management policies, but believe this legislation is both unnecessary and a poorly timed unfunded mandate for libraries.

