



The Voice of the Library Community

New York Library Association

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*****PRESS RELEASE*****

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NEW YORK'S PUBLIC LIBRARIES CALL ON GOVERNOR CUOMO TO INVEST IN EVERY COMMUNITY'S PUBLIC EDUCATION INFRASTRUCTURE; MATCH NEW YORK CITY'S \$30M ANNUAL COMMITMENT TO IMPROVING AGING LIBRARIES

ALBANY, NY – The Directors of New York's twenty-three public library systems, on behalf of all seven hundred fifty-six local public libraries, have released a letter calling on Governor Cuomo to increase funding for the state's Public Library Construction Aid Program for the first time in a decade, to match New York City's recent 10-year, \$300M commitment to libraries' capital needs. A long-overdue investment in our state's critical public education infrastructure will directly benefit every community and neighborhood that is home to a public library.

Communities throughout New York State have suffered from decades-old stagnant funding for the state Public Library Construction Aid Program. Despite a recent report from the State Education Department that \$2.2B is desperately needed for aging public library infrastructure projects statewide, funding has remained pegged at \$14M annually. Nearly half of the local public libraries in New York State are more than 60 years old, with an additional one-third more than 30 years old.

The persistent lack of capital funding to address aging, energy-inefficient buildings means operating revenues are increasingly consumed for energy costs at the expense of patron services at a time when library usage is at historic levels. A 2015 Siena Institute Research Poll found that library use is up 10% across all demographics statewide. Usage is up 15% among women respondents aged 18-34; up 15% in communities of color; and up 20% for households making less than \$50,000 annually. This same poll found that nearly 70% of New Yorkers have used their local public library in the past six months.

Though New York City has made a 10-year, \$300M capital commitment to improve library infrastructure, funding levels for the state Public Library Construction Aid Program provides less than \$10M annually to upstate and suburban communities. Neglect of this crucial public education infrastructure has been highlighted by the state's recent 5-year, \$900M commitment to the state park system, and a nearly \$10B pledge to address transportation infrastructure in the upcoming state budget.

Steve Bolton, Director of the North Country Library System (Jefferson, Lewis, Oswego, St. Lawrence Counties): "The libraries in our system serve some of the most economically disadvantaged communities in our state. Fairly funding the Construction Aid Program would generate more than a million dollars of annual economic activity in our region, and directly impact all sixty-five communities we serve with a public library. I urge Governor Cuomo to make this commonsense public infrastructure investment into the North Country."

Lauren Moore, Director of the Pioneer Library System (Livingston, Wayne, Ontario, Wyoming Counties): "For the communities in our region, the local public library is a critical education resource, and is often the last line of defense for troubled local economies. Our region is home to many of the state's most beautiful parks, but the recent investment in their infrastructure does not address declining town and village centers. A real commitment to the Construction Aid Program will directly inject money and jobs into every community with a public library."

Jeremy Johannesen, Executive Director of the New York Library Association: "The chronic underfunding of the state Public Library Construction Aid Program is creating an economic crisis for local communities – either raise local taxes, or further reduce the desperately needed library services on which New Yorkers rely. The state recognized its responsibility to local public libraries by creating the Construction Aid Program, and now is the time to fulfill that responsibility by providing adequate funding."

About NYLA:

The New York Library Association (NYLA) educates and advocates on behalf of New York's library community. NYLA is the oldest state library association in the country and represents school, college, special and public libraries, library staff, trustees, and students from around the state.

NYLA is the only statewide organization dedicated to advocating on behalf of all of New York's libraries and serves as the spokesperson on library matters to the media and public policymakers.

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