Dealing with libraries:

The Honorable Andrea Stewart-Cousins
President Pro Tempore and Majority Leader
188 State Street, Room 907, LOB
Albany, New York 12247

The Honorable Liz Krueger
Chair, Senate Finance Committee
416 Capitol
Albany, New York 12247

Dear Majority Leader Stewart-Cousins and Senator Krueger:

We write today to respectfully request an increase in funding for our public libraries in the Senate FY2022-2023 one-house budget proposal. For many years the Senate Majority has supported adequate funding for New York State’s libraries and library systems. During these unprecedented times, these entities have continued to provide critical services, education, technology infrastructure, and access to information to over 19.5 million New Yorkers statewide, including more than 10 million who hold library cards. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, libraries have stepped up across the state to provide vital services to communities, including internet access for remote student learners, virtual programming for all ages, and access to important health and safety resources and information.

During each of the prior five years, the Executive Budget Proposal had called for reductions in library aid at times when our libraries needed assistance the most. While we are pleased that this year’s Executive Budget Proposal calls for an increase in aid to public libraries, a mere $2 million increase comes far too short of what is truly needed. To this end, we are requesting the following support:

State Library Aid:

The 2022-23 Executive Budget proposes to increase funding for Aid to Public Libraries by a mere $2 million for a total of $96.1 million. State Library Aid ensures that every community and every New Yorker has access to quality library materials and services, and according to the State Education Department, every dollar invested in the State Library Aid program yields seven dollars’ worth of local library services. We have seen this investment pay off throughout the pandemic as libraries continually go above and beyond to provide services outside of their purview, including assisting patrons with unemployment and rental assistance, offering their computers for telehealth appointments, and coordinating PPE and test giveaways. Unfortunately, sustained underfunding has led to depleted services, degraded technology assets, and diminished educational programming. We recommend the Senate increase State Library Aid funding to $123.1 million. This investment in our libraries is the bare minimum of support we should provide for their invaluable services.

Library Construction Aid:

For the past several years, the Executive has slashed Library Construction Aid at a time when statewide library renovation and construction needs have been estimated to be $1.5 billion. Investment in the Library Construction Aid program must be increased to address aging infrastructure, energy-inefficient buildings, and the evolving ways that patrons use their libraries. We recommend the Senate increase funding for the Library Construction Aid program to $45 million. Last year, the Enacted Budget included $34 million for Library Construction Aid, which finally allowed libraries
to prioritize badly needed repairs. Slashing this funding back to $14 million at a time when libraries need capital investments the most is unacceptable.

The Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture and the Langston Hughes Community Library and Cultural Center:

The Executive Budget eliminates funding for the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture ($250,000) and Langston Hughes Community Library and Cultural Center ($75,000). We recommend restoring funding for both of these longstanding cultural institutions and allocating an additional $50,000 to each for a total of $300,000 for the Schomburg Center for Black Culture and $125,000 for the Langston Hughes Community Library and Cultural Center.

Love Your Library Funding:

The Love Your Library Fund, which was established nearly 17 years ago, collects funding through special DMV-issued license plates as well as corporate or personal income tax returns. Since the fund was created, none of the accumulated funds have been distributed. Thankfully, the Executive has proposed that $150,000 of this funding be earmarked for the Statewide Summer Reading Program; we agree with this proposal and ask that the Senate Budget Proposal reflect this funding allocation as well.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Funding

We respectfully request the creation of a new $1.25 million fund for libraries to use specifically for diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives. Many libraries across the state serve communities with diverse languages, cultures, and histories. These community members deserve libraries that meet their needs. It is our hope that libraries will use this funding to conduct diversity surveys of their current collections, purchase books that better serve the needs of their communities, host cultural events, and conduct other programming that will otherwise enhance community representation. The creation of this fund will help make our state’s libraries a more welcoming place for all New Yorkers.

By addressing the above-mentioned critical needs, we will be helping to ensure that our public libraries can continue to provide the critical services upon which all our constituents will continue to rely throughout the pandemic and in the years to come. As the Legislature continues developing strategies to reimagine New York’s economy in a post-COVID-19 world, it is essential for our library institutions to remain a vital component of that process. On behalf of our public libraries, library systems, and patrons, we thank you for your continued efforts and look forward to working with you and our colleagues to ensure our libraries remain a cornerstone of collaboration, awareness, equity, and education for all New Yorkers now and in the future. Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

Sean M. Ryan
New York State Senator, 60th Senate District

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30th Senate District

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15th Senate District
Rachel May
53rd Senate District

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8th Senate District

CC: Senator Liz Krueger, Finance Committee Chair
David Friedfel, Senate Finance
Shontell Smith, Senate Counsel
Eric Katz, Senate Counsel