



**Joint Legislative Budget Hearing
January 28, 2014**

Good afternoon and thank you for providing me the opportunity to present today regarding state funding for libraries and library systems.

I would like to begin by thanking the Legislature for providing \$4M in additional Library Aid funding in the 2013-14 Budget, and imploring Governor Cuomo to restore that same funding as part of his 2014-15 Executive Budget. I would also like to thank all those members of the Legislature who supported our legislative priorities last year.

Libraries are essential to their communities. They provide all New Yorkers with free and equitable access to information; they are a critical part of New York's education infrastructure; they bridge the "digital divide"; they deliver workforce development; and they are valued and vital gathering places for their communities.

Libraries are Education

Libraries are educational institutions, delivering learning opportunities at every stage of life. Libraries offer parents and caregivers opportunities to introduce their children to books and foster a love of reading through a variety of story-time programs designed to develop early literacy skills. From the elementary years through high school, librarians provide instruction that encourages critical thinking and information analysis to help prepare students for college and careers. Libraries continue to serve a crucial role in higher education, fueling research and providing navigation to an unending stream of information. Following formal education, libraries continue to serve the needs of the public, addressing human curiosity and hunger for information. Increasingly, as libraries provide space for community members to collaborate and pursue projects, they are becoming not only places to find information but also to create and share content.

Libraries are Information

Libraries serve as essential portals to the increasingly important world of digital information. Many New Yorkers do not have a computer or Internet access at home. For one third of minority households in New York, and for 67% of homes with an annual income below \$20,000, the local library is their primary source of Internet access. Public libraries bridge this "digital divide" by providing access to this technology. In 72.5% of New York's communities, public libraries are the only free source of Internet access. Librarians and staff are trained, tech-smart professionals who help library users learn to navigate the Internet and use digital devices to find the information they need.

Libraries are Economic Development

In recent years libraries have responded to community needs by expanding their roles in serving as workforce development, career training and job placement centers. Public libraries have no shortage of success stories about various patrons who participated in English as a second language classes, gained basic computer skills, returned to school to earned their GED, found employment, or even started a small business—all thanks to the services provided at the library.

Libraries are Critical Infrastructure

New York libraries are key in delivering needed support to communities in the aftermath of disasters and have stepped up to fulfill the role of "first restorers." Following Hurricane Irene and Super Storm Sandy, many libraries were open within hours, providing shelter and coordinating aid with other emergency response personnel. Libraries serve as refuges in the wake of disasters by providing residents with emergency information, warmth,

water, Internet access, recharging stations, and perhaps most importantly, a sense of belonging. Because libraries are well established as cornerstones of their communities, they undoubtedly have a lasting and profound role to play in disaster preparedness and response.

Libraries are Efficient

Governor Cuomo has spoken of the need for local governments to cooperate, collaborate, and share resources to achieve greater efficiency and economies of scale. For over fifty years, New York's Library Systems have served as a model of governmental cooperation and efficiency. Library Aid, in large part, supports our state's library systems; and library systems enable individual libraries to provide access to materials and services that they could never afford on their own. This is accomplished through sharing services, sharing resources and collections, and conducting cooperative purchasing. Perhaps the most widely recognized service our library systems offer is the infrastructure that makes inter-library loans possible. According to the State Education Department, state investment in libraries has yielded a return in excess of 7:1 for every dollar allocated.

Libraries are Woefully Underfunded

Although positive steps were taken last year, library funding is still down nearly 20% from what is stipulated in Education Law. The current Library Aid structure was devised nearly 30 years ago in 1986, and at that time was funded at \$72.9M. In 1986, few libraries had a computer. Today, New York's libraries provide over 17,000 publicly-accessible machines. In order to match the intentions of the framers of the Library Aid structure that has served New York for a generation, and to simply keep pace with inflation, Library Aid should actually be funded at over \$126M.

Libraries Need Your Support

The Governor's proposed Budget cuts New York State Library Aid to \$81.6M, which is below where it was sixteen years ago in 1997. This diminished funding comes at a time when library usage and demand for services are up. Libraries have long been role models for shared services, but they have tightened their budgets and increased efficiencies to the breaking point. In order to maintain the critical information infrastructure that New York libraries provide, Library Aid, as stipulated in education law (\$102M based on the 2010 Census) must be provided.

No other state-funded service serves so many people for so few dollars. Even if fully funded to \$102M, Library Aid would amount to less than 1/10 of 1% of the NYS Budget, and yet the libraries and library systems that this funding supports serve over 14M New Yorkers.

Your constituents overwhelmingly support their libraries. Over the past three years, on average, 97% of library budgets have been approved by the voters. I urge the members of the Legislature to make a commitment to invest in New York's libraries so that they might continue to deliver on their potential, by putting in place a tiered multi-year commitment to fund Library Aid at 21st Century levels.

Libraries make for better communities, a better informed public, bridge the "digital divide" and support the functioning of democracy. Supporting library funding is an investment in New York's economic growth, an investment in educational and cultural infrastructure, an investment in New York's citizens, and an investment that will produce a substantial return and make a lasting positive difference for New York State.

Libraries are education.

Libraries are access.

Libraries are technology.

Libraries are efficient.

Fully fund Library Aid to \$102M.

Respectfully Submitted,
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