



**Testimony of the New York Library Association
Briana McNamee, Director of Government Relations & Advocacy
Joint Legislative Hearing on Elementary and Secondary Education
February 11, 2020**

Good Afternoon. I'm Briana McNamee, and I serve as the Director of Government Relations and Advocacy for the New York Library Association. Thank you for providing me the opportunity to testify today on behalf of our state's local, public, school, and academic libraries and library systems, and the more than 10 million New Yorkers who hold library cards.

I would like to begin by recognizing our partners and advocates in the Legislature for fighting back against Governor Cuomo's attack on library funding last year, and especially for your efforts in June to secure \$34M for the Public Library Construction Aid Program. As you know, more than half our state's local public libraries are now more than 60 years old, with another third now more than 30 years old. Your support for this program is changing communities and neighborhoods where needs are greater than available economic resources. We are incredibly appreciative of your efforts.

This year, once again, the Governor's Executive Budget aggressively attacks local libraries and library services. This Executive Budget proposed year-2000 State Library Aid Funding of \$91.6M, and slashes funding for the State Library Construction Aid Program by nearly 60%. This approach to library development is not just inequitable in relation to overall funding; it is improvident, incongruous, and incompatible with how New Yorker's view libraries – as indispensable institutions in their communities.

The Library of TODAY

Libraries are safe, welcoming public spaces that foster community cohesion through diverse programming and access to community meeting places and local services, but this mission is threatened by a lack of sustainable state funding.

The State Library Aid program is the primary source of funding for New York's library systems, which provide shared services and resources to each library in New York. These system services ensure that every community and every New Yorker, regardless of relative wealth, has access to quality library materials and services. Library system services are efficient, effective, and empower community libraries. According to the State Education Department (SED), each dollar invested in the State Library Aid program returns seven dollars in local library services.

The unfortunate reality is that sustained underfunding has led to depleted services, degraded technology assets, and diminished educational programming.

Eroding Services

The New York State Aid to Libraries program has been stalled for over a decade. Funding of \$96.6M in last year's budget was below 2008 levels. To simply keep pace with inflation based on 2008 funding levels, library aid for FY2020 would need to be above \$118M. This at a time when the programs and services that

libraries are being called upon to deliver are more expensive than ever. From providing access to information technology and high-speed internet, to supporting the upcoming 2020 Census, libraries are struggling to supply the resources and services that their users need and deserve. It is past time for a bold new investment in not what libraries have always been, but rather what they have become: information access hubs, and the educational and cultural center of the community, open to all, for the betterment of all. NYLA calls upon the Legislature to reimagine libraries and reimagine library funding and **invest \$200M in the New York State Aid to Libraries program.**

Rapidly Aging Infrastructure

After a decade of stagnant funding, appropriations for the State Library Construction Aid Program have increased, but staggering needs persist. A recent report issued by the State Education Department's Division of Library Development (DLD) details a \$1.5B capital need for public libraries statewide. Of the 756 public libraries in New York State, nearly 400 are over 60 years old; 155 were built before 1900. According to DLD, the State Library Construction Aid Program leverages a nearly 5:1 return for every dollar invested. Recent attempts to address library infrastructure issues with increased state funding are making a difference, and we advocate for an even more aggressive approach – **funding for the Public Library Construction Aid Program should be increased to \$75M in FY2020-21.**

Who are libraries? Their community.

Lifelong Education Providers

Our state's libraries and librarians connect disenfranchised individuals and marginalized populations to information resources and educational opportunities they would otherwise be denied, particularly to resources for financial, health, and digital literacies. Core to this mission is creating comprehensive information fluency curricula for New York's elementary and secondary students, delivered by certified School Librarians. Currently, students lack a universal right to instruction by school librarians, which diminishes college-readiness, career opportunities, and meaningful participation in civic life.

Further, many libraries lack the financial resources to provide the materials or services their patrons need. State Library Aid must increase to provide every student with access to a certified School Librarian and guarantee libraries are fully staffed with access to quality continuing education resources.

Combatants of Information Inequity

Libraries serve as essential portals to the modern world of digital information. Historically marginalized and underserved communities live in diminished information environments – they have been, and continue to be, digitally disenfranchised. In 2018, a Siena Research poll found that for nearly 33% of African American and Latino respondents, and 25% of households making less than \$50,000 annually, the local public library is their primary source of internet access. Without the digital and information services provided by their local library, New Yorkers would have been unable to sign up for health care coverage, complete college applications and student loan documents, find job opportunities, research the positions of elected officials and candidates, and review proposed state and local budget decisions that directly impact their daily lives. Furthermore, this access will be essential for our state's success for a complete count in the 2020 Census.

In addition, library services are particularly crucial in historically economically disadvantaged communities. Participants of the earlier referenced poll were recorded as to having used their local public library for job seeking or career building programs in the last six months; 53% were African American, and 40% were households making less than \$50,000 annually.

We are cognizant of the present fiscal challenges. This year, New York State will grapple with a \$6.1B budget deficit. The Governor and members of the Legislature will be confronted with increasingly difficult decision

about how best to allocate stagnant and shrinking revenues in a way that ensures every New Yorker is a full participant in their own story, the development of their community, and the direction of our state.

Invest in community. Invest in libraries.

Respectfully Submitted,
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