February 5, 2021

The Honorable Andrea Stewart-Cousins
Majority Leader, NYS Senate
LOB Room 907
Albany, NY 14227

Dear Leader Stewart-Cousins:

We write today to respectfully request an increase in funding for our public libraries in the Senate FY21-22 one-house budget proposal. For many years the Senate has long supported adequate funding for our libraries, and in these unprecedented times, New York’s libraries and library systems have continued to provide critical services, education, technology infrastructure and access to information for over 19.5 million New Yorkers statewide. 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.

Unfortunately, for the fifth year in a row, the Executive Budget Proposal calls for a reduction in library aid at a time when our libraries need assistance the most. These continued reductions come at a time when libraries are facing millions of dollars in unforeseen costs as they adjust operations in response to the COVID-19 pandemic; earlier this fall, the New York Library Association distributed a survey to libraries across the state to determine these expenditures and found that on average, libraries spent over $6,500 on items like PPE, plexiglass and HVAC upgrades. Pursuant to these circumstances, we are requesting the following support:

**State Library Aid:**
The 2021-22 Executive Budget proposes to decrease funding for Aid to Public Libraries by $7.1 million dollars for a total of $87 million dollars. I recommend the Senate propose a full restoration of $4.6M in Aid to Public Libraries, plus an additional increase to $123.1M for total State Library Aid.

**Library Construction Aid:**
I recommend the Senate continue its commitment to improving our library facilities across New York State and provide an additional $31 million for library construction aid for a total of $45 million with a focus on libraries addressing digital equity needs in their community. This funding will support maintenance, renovation, and expansion of existing facilities and new construction of public libraries throughout the state.

A full restoration of $250,000 in funding for the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture and $75,000 in funding for 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). I recommend restoring funding for both of these longstanding cultural institutions.

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