



**Testimony of the New York Library Association
Joint Legislative Budget Hearing on Education
January 31, 2018**

Good afternoon. Thank you for providing me the opportunity to testify today on behalf of our state's local libraries, 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 last year's proposed cuts to the State Library Aid and State Public Library Construction Aid programs; though State Library Aid was flat-funded in last year's enacted budget, the Legislature fought to not only restore the Governor's proposed cut to State Public Library Construction Aid Program, but secured total funding of \$24M – a high-water mark in the program's thirty-plus-year history. As you know, more than half our state's local public libraries are now more than 60 years old; another third older than 30; and SED has identified statewide capital needs of more than \$1.7B. Your support for this program is being used in communities and neighborhoods where needs are greater than available economic resources; it is preserving opportunities and saving libraries. 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 proposes year-2000 State Library Aid funding of \$91.6M, and slashes funding for the State Library Construction Aid Program more than 40%. This approach to library development is not just inequitable in relation to overall Education funding; it is improvident, incongruous, and incompatible with how New Yorkers view libraries -- as indispensable educational institutions in their communities.

Our state's local libraries are core educational institutions in each community they serve – **Libraries Are Education**. State Library Aid should be fully-funded under the law but must at least see funding increases that are proportionate with annual increases in school aid and overall education 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. Library system services are efficient, effective, and empower community libraries to innovate in response to local needs. SED data indicates that each dollar invested in the State Library Aid program returns seven dollars in local library services. The past decade of underfunding alone - which exceeds \$117M - has deprived our communities of more than \$800M in local library services. This has led to depleted services, degraded technology assets, and diminished educational programming. To be clear: when we fail to fund library services, New Yorkers' local tax burdens increase, and services are compromised.

We are cognizant of the present fiscal challenges. This year, New York State will grapple with a \$4.4B budget deficit; projected, growing out-year deficits; and the looming, uncertain impacts of federal policy decisions. The Governor and members of the Legislature will be confronted with increasingly difficult decisions 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.

Full and robust funding for libraries and library services is the best place to start.

Libraries are Education

Libraries are chartered by the same Board of Regents which oversees schools, colleges, BOCES and other educational institutions, and State Library Aid is administered through the NYS Education Department. Libraries are the original universal pre-K and stand as the lone public institutions dedicated to lifelong education. When schools close at the end of each day, each week and each school year, libraries remain open to New York's children and families.

These points aren't conjecture or platitudes – they are rooted in fact. Recent polling data provided by Siena Research Institute found that 94% of respondents said their local public library is important to our state's educational infrastructure, which includes 97% of respondents from households making less than \$50,000 annually. A clear majority of respondents demand increased library funding, with nearly half saying library funding should increase proportionately with education funding. It is time to bring funding priorities in line with how an overwhelming majority of New Yorkers view these critical educational resources.

Library Funding is About Access and Equality

Libraries serve as essential portals to the modern world of digital information. Startlingly, **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 local libraries, 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. Further, the above-referenced Siena Poll found that library services are particularly crucial in historically economically disadvantaged communities: of the respondents who have 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.

Library Infrastructure is Rapidly Aging and Requires State Capital Investment

After a decade of stagnant funding, appropriations for the State Library Construction Aid Program have increased slightly, but a staggering need persists. A recent report issued by the State Education Department's Division of Library Development (DLD) details a \$1.7B capital need for public libraries statewide. Nearly half of New York's local public libraries are now over 60 years old, and an additional one-third are more than 30 years old. According to DLD, the State Library Construction Aid Program leverages a nearly 5:1 return for every dollar invested.

Libraries are Economic Development

Libraries serve workforce development needs, and function as career training and job placement centers. Public libraries have no shortage of success stories about patrons who participated in English as a second language classes, gained basic computer skills, returned to school to earn their GED, found employment, or even started a small business—all thanks to the services provided at the library. Again, these services are particularly important in economically disadvantaged communities; of those who used their local public library for job seeking or career building programs, 53% were African-American, and 40% were households making less than \$50,000 annually. In fact, according to circulation statistics provided by the New York Public Library, the TASC study guide used to prepare for high school equivalency exams is consistently one of the most circulated materials systemwide.

Libraries are education.
Libraries are access.
Libraries are equality.

Respectfully Submitted,
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