



Testimony for Joint Legislative Budget Committee Hearing on Elementary & Secondary Education
January 29, 2026

Good afternoon,

My name is Max Prime. I have the privilege of serving the New York Library Association (NYLA) as their Director of Government Relations and Advocacy. Thank you for providing me with the opportunity to testify today on behalf of our state's libraries, library systems, and the more than 10 million New Yorkers who hold library cards.

For New York's library community, the funding outlined in Governor Kathy Hochul's FY 2027 Executive Budget constitutes a distressing retrenchment of the aid-related progress it has celebrated in each of the last two fiscal years.

To that end, the FY 2027 Executive Budget includes:

- \$104.67 million for State Library Aid
- \$34 million for Library Construction Aid
- \$3 million for NOVELny
- \$12 million for Stabilization of the Office of Cultural Education.

At \$104.67 million for State Library Aid, FY 2027 is the second consecutive Executive Budget to propose funding of a scale that satisfies statutory aid requirements under Education Law. However, **that allocation is also a \$1.655 million cut that would virtually erase the increases secured by members of the Senate and Assembly in last year's enacted budget.** Likewise, **\$34 million for Library Construction Aid is a \$10 million cut** relative to the \$44 million appropriated for the program last year. It would cover just 1.94% of New York's estimated \$1.75 billion in statewide library construction needs.

Beyond direct appropriations, this year's proposal also neglects to address longstanding spending-related policy matters, including **per-pupil reimbursement rates for Instructional Materials Aids, like Library Materials Aid, that have remained stagnant since 2007.**

While NYLA is sincerely grateful for the Executive's inclusion of \$3 million in continued funding for NOVELny and \$12 million of new money for stabilization of the Office of Cultural Education, failure to adequately support core library programs fundamentally weakens New York's library ecosystem and, in turn, undermines what is an undeniable asset for any affordability agenda.

Our libraries and library systems are vital institutions of foundational and lifelong learning that exist to serve **all** New Yorkers. They advance literacy, promote equity in education, bridge gaps in access to critical resources, and are relied on as safe, trusted spaces that anchor communities across our state. With adequate funding as outlined below, our libraries can innovate and develop ways to serve the rapidly evolving needs of their patrons. Without it, they will struggle to even maintain the core services they already perform.

State Library Aid:

The State Aid for Libraries program is the primary source of funding for New York's library systems, which provide shared services and resources to each library in our state. These system services ensure that every community, and every New Yorker, regardless of relative wealth or background, has access to quality library materials and services. Library system services are efficient, effective, and empower 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 across three decades has led to depleted services, degraded technology assets, and diminished capacity for community educational programming. Since FY 1992, the first year of formula-based library aid following the program's creation via Chapter 917 of the laws of 1990, State Library Aid has been underfunded by over \$207 million relative to statute, with over \$155 million of that gap occurring in the last 17 years.

Furthermore, despite satisfying statutory requirements, the funding proposed for State Library Aid in this year's Executive Budget is functionally inadequate compared to the actual needs of New York's libraries. Adjusted for inflation, today the initial statutory requirement of \$76 million established in FY 1992 would be \$181.32 million — \$76.65 million greater than what is currently required under statute without even factoring in the costs associated with the expansion of technology and services that have occurred in the intervening 35 years.

Members of the legislature have documented this issue as far back as 2003, when now former Assemblymember Sandra R. Galef, then Chair of the Assembly Standing Committee on Libraries and Education Technology, wrote in the committee's annual report:

...since the enactment of Chapter 917 of the laws of 1990, which provided libraries with a regular and steady funding formula, the scope of services that libraries provide to the public has been expected to expand with the changing technologies. Unfortunately, the funding provided to libraries under that formula has not grown at a comparable rate. There are a range of services, including internet access, computerized cataloging, database access, and staff with the skills to support these services that are now a necessary part of running a library.

With these considerations in mind, New York's libraries and systems require substantially greater investment if they are to accommodate soaring operational costs, expensive intellectual freedom challenges, and stay responsive to emerging technologies and urgent community needs.

NYLA is requesting \$181.32 million in State Aid to Libraries this year.

Library Construction Aid:

As in FY 2026, the FY 2027 Executive Budget proposes an austere \$10M cut to State Aid for Library Construction, a 22.7% reduction compared to current funding. NYLA laments that the Legislature is once again forced to engage in the process of identifying and resecuring aid for library construction in response to proposed cuts, and we appreciate the consistency with which you have restored said funding each time it has been imperiled.

Unfortunately, the frequent repetition of this process has left the program stagnant and underfunded. With each successive year of underfunding, the level of statewide need continues to grow.

According to the most recent data available from the New York State Library Division of Library Development, 72% of our state's public library buildings are 50 years old or older, with 36% 100 years old or greater. As our already aging libraries continue to grow older, existing issues will compound, the price of labor, materials, and operations will go up, and without action the ability of libraries to serve their patrons will diminish.

The consequences of inaction are already evident in the rapid growth of New York's estimated statewide library construction needs. For the period spanning 2021 and 2025, the New York State Library estimated the state's overall public library construction needs at \$1.53 billion. For the period spanning 2023 to 2027, that need has increased by \$220 million to \$1.75 billion.

Whether awarded for a new roof, HVAC system, or broadband connectivity project, immediate investment is required to ensure that our public libraries are modern, safe, and accessible to all users.

NYLA is requesting a \$175 million allocation to the state's Library Construction Program.

Instructional Materials Aid:

Library Materials Aid (LMA) is reimbursement-based financial support meant to bolster local funds budgeted for school library programs. LMA is a category of Instructional Materials Aid (IMA), along with aid for textbooks, software, and hardware. Aid for each is essential to ensure students have access to educational materials and technology.

Since 1994, the per pupil rate for library materials has only increased \$4.25. Currently, school districts are eligible to receive up to \$6.25 per pupil for those attending public and nonpublic schools within their boundaries for such materials. This allocation level has remained flat since 2007, when the current level was set in the year's Education, Labor, and Family Assistance Article VII legislation.

District costs for hardware, software, textbooks, and library materials have increased substantially over the last 19 years. Per the most recent data available from School Library Journal, the average cost of a new hardcover book is \$27.25 when purchased by a school library – more than four times the current level of aid.

This reality, combined with Chapter 571 of the Laws of 2023 expanding the definition of library materials to include digital material, means that school librarians desperately need additional resources to ensure collections are modern, support educational needs, and reflect student interests.

NYLA is requesting an increase in the rate of Library Materials Aid to \$11.33/per pupil

NOVELny:

NOVELny is a web-based suite of databases and digital resources featuring hundreds of magazines, journals, newspapers, maps, charts, research, and reference materials available to all New Yorkers free of charge. The resources needed to fund the continuation of NOVELny require fresh appropriation each year or the program will face discontinuation.

Originating as a pilot program in the year 2000, NOVELny has since become embedded as a crucial resource for patrons in school, public, and academic libraries, as well as for individuals who access it remotely. In just one year of use, New Yorkers used the platform to conduct 25 million searches, with a large portion of its users coming from school libraries in districts where the independent purchase of database packages would be prohibitively expensive.

By taking advantage of state contract rates and purchasing centrally, each dollar spent will provide \$97 worth of access for New Yorkers. Furthermore, it ensures equity of access to high quality reference and research materials for all New York State students and residents, regardless of community, school district, or personal circumstance.

NYLA is requesting \$3.1 million for the continuation of NOVELny

Office of Cultural Education Stabilization:

The primary source of operational funding for the New York State Office of Cultural Education (OCE), including the New York State Library (NYSL), State Archives, State Museum, Summer School of the Arts, and Public

Broadcasting Program, is the Cultural Education Account. The account is funded by the Cultural Education Fee, a one-time fee collected by county clerks and clerks for the City of New York for the real estate deed transfers. The current fee of \$15 was set in 2002 and has not increased in 23 years, despite core costs like wages and employee benefits more than doubling in that period.

As such, the OCE has run deficit budgets for 15 out of the last 17 years, with coming years projected to see deficit large enough to fundamentally destabilize aspects of OCE's core operations due to the cumulative impact of deferred maintenance, unfilled positions, and stopgap measures that have eroded operational capacity.

Without the vital work of the OCE and NYSL to empower and support local efforts, New York's libraries would be unable to deliver services to patrons at current levels. The NYSL administers state-level services for public libraries and library systems. In practical terms, this means ensuring essential funding for local libraries is efficiently disbursed, maximizing library construction aid via review and support for applications, providing technical assistance to New York's 762 public libraries, administering legislative and discretionary grant programs, processing public librarian certification, and overseeing trustee education.

NYLA is requesting \$12 million for stabilization of the Office of Cultural Education, as included in the FY 2027 Executive Budget.

The Future of Libraries:

Libraries cannot continue to serve their communities and students with the proposed budget. From providing a supportive environment for students to do homework and explore their intellectual curiosities, to offering free access to entertainment and education resources for families experiencing financial insecurity, providing passport services and support for new immigrants, and aiding job seekers working to get back on their feet, New York's libraries have something to offer every New Yorker. We implore the Legislature to invest in our state's libraries so that your constituents, our patrons, and our communities can thrive.

NYLA FY 2027 Budget Requests

State Aid for Libraries:	\$181.32M
State Aid for Library Construction:	\$175M
Library Materials Aid:	\$11.33/pupil
NOVELny:	\$3.1M
Office of Cultural Education Stabilization:	\$12M