

TO: The Honorable Bob Reilly, Chair
NYS Assembly Committee on Libraries and Education Technology

FR: Tom Lawrence, Convener
Central Libraries Association of New York State

DT: November 26, 2012

RE: PREPARED TESTIMONY ON THE IMPACT OF STATE FUNDING OF PUBLIC LIBRARIES

I am submitting testimony today on behalf of the twenty-six central and co-central libraries of New York State. I am the library Director of the Poughkeepsie Public Library District, the Central Library of the Mid-Hudson Library System.

New York State funding in support of public library services is critical to the success of central library services to residents of the public library systems. Working with the systems, the central libraries deliver a range of services to fellow system libraries as well as directly to patrons. Whether it be traditional reference service provided to patrons who enter the library or to those who use email, chat, fax or text, central libraries continue to assist patrons on a daily basis when the smaller, local library does not have the resources or staff expertise to provide timely assistance.

Based on a Central Library Plan of Service created by each public library system board and each central library board, central libraries provide a wide range of consultative and support services. These services include the following:

- support of commercial database selection and licensing
- non-fiction material purchases in a depth and breadth not typically found in many public libraries in order to sustain intellectual and educational development
- commercial database use training for member library staff
- local library collection assessments to determine current applicability and appropriateness for patron use and access
- staff training in areas of front line reference assistance
- workforce development in areas of technology training and assistance with job searches
- interlibrary loan of materials needed by patrons that are not held regionally

Central libraries and public library systems work cooperatively to enhance library services provided by local libraries but, unlike most systems, central libraries are on the front lines. Their staff have daily contact with patrons who have a wide range of needs. The experience of this “real” library work is critical to the practical development of plans and services that meet the public library needs of New Yorkers.

Systems do a great job in providing critical support services such as delivery of materials, management of shared integrated library systems that offer check-out and cataloging of library materials, trustee training, and continuing education. Hundreds of public libraries wouldn’t be able to function without them. But the real face of public library service is in the local libraries found throughout New York in communities both large and small, affluent and not-so affluent.

With access to central library and system support, every local public library can be confident that the resources and services funded by the State will be there to fulfill user demands beyond those afforded by local tax dollars and that every New York State resident will achieve equity in public library service, regardless of where they may live.