

## **Senate Hearing on Funding Public Libraries**

March 5, 2012

### **Cassie Guthrie**

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Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today about the importance of library funding to New Yorkers who live in rural areas of the state. My name is Cassie Guthrie, and I am the Director of the Pioneer Library System headquartered in Canandaigua. Our service area is approximately 2,500 square miles over four counties – Ontario, Wayne, Wyoming and Livingston.

The Pioneer Library System provides crucial infrastructure to 42 small and rural public libraries, including nine in Wyoming County. Of the four counties we serve, Wyoming is the most rural, and has the lowest rate of post-high school education and the lowest level of pre-kindergarten participation. Public transportation options are few - a trip across the county on a bus can consume much of a day. There is only one bookstore in all of Wyoming County.

Availability of residential broadband internet access in rural areas is spotty at best, and most who live in the western half of Wyoming County rely on dial-up or DSL. And that's if they are in a position to be able to afford home access at all. According to a 2010-2011 study commissioned by The American Library Association, 73% of New York State public libraries offer the only free access to computers and the Internet in their communities.<sup>1</sup> Another study by the same organization stated that nearly ¾ of job seekers nationwide now use the Internet to find employment, in part because this is the only way to apply for many job opportunities.<sup>2</sup>

I would like to give you two examples of ways in which we provide the infrastructure that allows our rural libraries to level the playing field and offer 21<sup>st</sup> century library services to their communities. And I offer these examples with real dollars attached, so that you can see how cost-effectively public library systems operate these consolidated services.

#### 1<sup>st</sup> Example – Internet Infrastructure:

At Pioneer we employ a Systems Administrator who ensures that our rural residents receive fast, reliable access to the Internet when they visit their local library. Before coming to work for us in 2007, Bob was in IT at Kraft Foods for more than 10 years.

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<sup>1</sup>American Library Association, "Libraries Connect Communities: Public Library Funding & Technology Access Study 2010-2011," [http://www.ala.org/research/initiatives/plftas/2010\\_2011/ny1011](http://www.ala.org/research/initiatives/plftas/2010_2011/ny1011) (accessed March 2, 2012).

<sup>2</sup>American Library Association, "Job-Seeking in U.S. Public Libraries," [http://www.ala.org/research/sites/ala.org.research/files/content/initiatives/plftas/2010\\_2011/jobbrief11.pdf](http://www.ala.org/research/sites/ala.org.research/files/content/initiatives/plftas/2010_2011/jobbrief11.pdf) (accessed March 2, 2012).

The cost of his position last year was \$75,000, which includes salary, benefits and building overhead. A very conservative estimate of what it would cost for all of our libraries to hire a consultant for just a few hours a week to do what Bob does is \$650,000. We do it 89% more cost effectively than our libraries could do it on their own.

2<sup>nd</sup> Example – Delivery Infrastructure:

Last year Pioneer moved 375,000 books and other materials back and forth between our libraries. This is resource sharing at its best. A resident of the smallest community served by a library in Wyoming County (the Village of Wyoming – population 500) has the same access to books and information as a resident of Pioneer’s largest library community (Canandaigua - population 25,000). The sharing of materials is a tremendous savings that allows the 300,000+ New Yorkers who live in the Pioneer Library System to access much more than what the budgets of only their local library can provide.

The cost for our delivery service in 2011– including labor, vehicle maintenance, gasoline and overhead – was \$147,000. That’s 20¢ per transit, or 40¢ round-trip. As an alternative, our libraries could do this through the US postal service. At its cheapest, the cost would be \$2.75 per transit, or \$5.50 round-trip. This translates to nearly \$2M dollars to move the same number of library materials back and forth. We do it 93% more cost effectively than our libraries could do it on their own.

Library funding as proposed in this year’s Executive Budget is below 1994 levels. The Pioneer Library System cannot continue to tackle the technology and library service expectations of 2012 with the funding of 1994. In 1994, our libraries maybe had a single dial-up connection to the Internet for staff use. Today, all 42 offer high speed Internet access, wireless hot spots, and multiple public computing workstations with printing. Our staff was downsized in 2010, and will be again this year. The staff that remain are being asked to take on more and more responsibilities, and we have no ability to compensate them for it.

Our public library systems offer important options to the residents of rural areas of the state. If those options disappear, there is nothing left to replace them. Please take this into consideration when making decisions about library aid.

I would like to conclude by quoting from a report of the Knight Commission on the Information Needs of Communities in a Democracy:

“The digital age is creating an information and communications renaissance. But it is not serving all Americans and their local communities equally. It is not yet serving democracy fully. How we react, individually and collectively, to this democratic shortfall will affect the quality of our lives and the very nature of our communities.”<sup>3</sup>

Thank you.

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<sup>3</sup> The Knight Commission on the Information Needs of Communities in a Democracy, “Informing Communities: Sustaining Democracy in the Digital Age,” [http://www.knightcomm.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/02/Informing\\_Communities\\_Sustaining\\_Democracy\\_in\\_the\\_Digital\\_Age.pdf](http://www.knightcomm.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/02/Informing_Communities_Sustaining_Democracy_in_the_Digital_Age.pdf) (accessed March 2, 2012).