

**LIBRARY TRUSTEES ASSOCIATION OF NYS**- Public Hearing Testimony on Funding Public Libraries in New York State being conducted by the Assembly Committee on Libraries and Education Technology November 29, 2011.

The Library Trustees Association of NYS was chartered by the Board of Regents in February 1949. On April 12<sup>th</sup> of that year, Governor Thomas E. Dewey and his aides met with four library trustees about State aid for public libraries. As a result of that meeting 10 library trustees and five state officials were appointed to the Governor's Committee on Library Aid. The committee's recommendations were approved by the Governor and the Legislature in 1950. It was the first major library state aid law in the nation!

Governor Dewey and the Legislature made an investment of State dollars for libraries because they realized how important libraries are to the cultural education of its citizens. Before a child begins their formal education by attending school, they have already been exposed to books and the excitement of learning at their local library's Storytime Program. This is the earliest investment New York makes in its citizens.

In these challenging and difficult economic times, libraries are playing a much broader role in the services they provide than ever before. They have developed into community centers offering the unemployed and underemployed computer services, internet access for online job searching, resume writing and other employment services. Libraries form partnerships with businesses and government agencies to offer patrons special programs and services like free tax preparation, "how to" classes, information on health and wellness, and many more informative and sometimes life saving programs.

Thankfully, the Assembly was able to restore \$3M in library aid funding in the 2011-2012 budget. However, the impact of the cuts has taken its toll on too many libraries: a trustee of the Waterloo Library in Waterloo, NY writes that the cuts have an adverse affect on the operational budget of the library each year. Companies providing services like heating, electricity, insurance, etc. can and do raise their rates. The cost increases but funding gets cut. Consequently, the money to stay operational must come from somewhere so books, programs, services and hours of operation get cut.

A trustee from the Chemung County Library District strongly contends that state and regional governments that do not provide funding for public libraries are not only denying their citizens opportunities for self-improvement, cultural enrichment, and financial security, they are also depriving their communities of engaged and informed citizens.

From the Fairport Public Library in Rochester, a trustee writes that the current amount of State funding for 2011 is a 29% reduction from 2008, bringing State aid to 1993 levels. There has not been a new source of revenue to replace this loss of State funding.

The Regents have charged each library trustee to "ensure that financial resources are being used efficiently and effectively toward meeting the institution's goals." We, as trustees, cannot fulfill our fiduciary responsibility and safeguard our institution's mission when the Governor and Legislature of New York State continue to cut library funding.

The Library Trustees Association of NYS has two recommendations for future library needs: It is imperative that the Governor and Legislature identify a dedicated funding stream to stabilize library aid and to ensure the future library services. It is further recommended that the Governor and Legislature work in collaboration with the Board of Regents and the Library Trustees Association to train and certify library trustees in New York State.