



The Nyack Library

Established 1879

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Remarks to the Assembly Standing Committee on Libraries and Education Technology

I speak to you as the senior Director in the Ramapo Catskill Library System, having served now for 26 years, through four system Directors, and as the Director of The Nyack Library in Rockland County.

My perspective allows me to take a broad overview of what Public Library systems mean to the small and medium sized libraries in our area, and I can tell you that now more than ever, we need the support that our library system provides us. Public libraries are a substantially different entity than what I entered into when I became a Library Director in 1985. Back then we were still in the age of the placid library that had served communities well for several generations in the 20th century. It was a time when vinyl records were still competing with audio cassettes and about all most public libraries could afford for a computer then was an Apple 2E with the *immense* capacity of 64 KB bites of RAM. Back then, you could easily ignore the regional Library System as long as you kept your head down in the old card catalog and perceived your own local library as a neighborhood entity largely complete unto itself.

But our libraries changed radically in 1991 when pioneers like my own library chartered the way to technology, and became automated with circulation, catalog and back-office functions. We could not possibly have done that without the Ramapo Catskill Library System, its leadership and advice. We could not possibly continue to offer even basic standard automated services today without the glue that keeps all 47 public libraries together in our four counties: and that is RCLS.

It is not easier today to function as a public library than it was in 1985. It is decidedly harder. Any public library that tells you it can function as an independent entity without the guidance and structural support of its regional system, is, in my opinion blind to the cooperative nature of superior library services in New York State. I need the central cataloging functions of RCLS to make my materials accessible to the public; I need the advice of our experienced professional consultants to assist me with adult and children's services that would otherwise be lackluster; I need its delivery services for interlibrary loan that RCLS brings to us so efficiently every day, to satisfy our user's thirst for knowledge, education and reading pleasure.

Now more than ever, my library needs the Ramapo Catskill Library System to support our mission of public service. Perhaps we do not really need more direct funding from the State budget (although we can use all the help we can get); what we need are *the people* at RCLS who help us do our job for the over-arching demands of public service. I urge the New York State Legislature to properly fund our precious Public Library Systems so that our local libraries can be vehicles of educational and social advancement. Our mission is united and dependent upon mutual cooperation - we need RCLS!

Sincerely,

James Mahoney, MLS
Library Director