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**Assembly Committee on Libraries  
Testimony, November 29, 2011**

I'm not here to speak about how important libraries and library systems are to the public- open many, many hours each week and open to every person in New York State. I'm sure my colleagues can do a much better job than I ever could.

I'm here to speak about equity concerns- both at the library system and library level and at the end user level- the people who support the library day in and day out, year after year.

From 1981 to 2005, I worked as a library consultant at the Division of Library Development. I saw the good, bad and ugly years of state support for libraries and systems. Yes, believe it or not there were some good years during that period. So good in fact that many state funded programs were enjoying the benefit of something called "full funding". Unfortunately, library systems were not one of those lucky ones.

At DLD, I ran a 10 year state aid chart that showed systems receiving 10% less annually in funding than was authorized by law. This, over a 10 year period, equals 9 years of funding. What scale of equity was used when these cuts were being made?

Fast forward to today and as new cuts are proposed and implemented we hear things like "level the playing field", "equal cuts across the board" and "all must share the pain".

Legislative dollars drive the direction of library systems and libraries. A good driver not only looks ahead, but also makes good use of the rear-view mirror. Legislators need to look behind to see what effect their earlier decisions had on library services before they take up the chant to "level the playing field".

There is no question about us going through a difficult economic time. Governments and agencies, at all levels, are fueled by tax dollars. When money was not a problem, accountability wasn't an important issue. There is no abundance of money now, and accountability has become an issue. We are hearing the need to consolidate our services to save taxpayer dollars. What kind of consolidation are we talking about here? There are 753 public libraries in New York serving a statewide population of 19,378,102. Yes, there are some small libraries that could, and quite frankly should be absorbed by larger libraries. That would save a little money here and there. But legislators need to realize that libraries give a "bigger bang for the buck" than any other service in the state. We reach out to, and serve, all who choose to walk into a library and those who can't walk into a library. What other agency can make that claim?

We are cost effective in the services we supply to our constituents - that is, cost effective to those constituents who don't have to pay twice for the same service. I'm speaking of those people who live in a doubly taxed library service area - areas where two (or more) library boundaries overlap each other and the residents must pay twice for service. The problem of the doubly taxed library service areas has been around for a long time. The low level grumble I heard about when I worked in DLD has become a roar now that I work more closely with the doubly taxed.

In my service area alone I have two doubly taxed areas. Both were chartered long after we were. In one the 1,970 residents are paying a total of \$202,713 (based on a per capita of \$102.90) to us and \$141,308 (based on a per capita of \$71.73) to the other library. The figures for the other overlap are much less, but the concept is the same.

Neither library wants to lose the revenue generated by this population. But it begs the question "Is it fair or equitable to these residents?" I contend that it wasn't fair when the overlap was created and now it is even more of a financial burden than ever.

When I was at LD, I worked on this issue. The work went nowhere and the problem remains. My estimate is that there are approximately 87 doubly taxed service areas in New York. There are 753 libraries. Exclude NYPL, QBPL, and BPL and you are left with 11.67% of service areas where some residents are paying twice.

There are mapping and census tools available that can accurately calculate just how large the problem is and what it is costing the taxpayers. Let's look at the problem and figure out a way to address it so that it is equitable to those libraries concerned.

Yes, there have been attempts in the past to address this issue. However, the magnitude of the problem was never really explored and in at least one piece of legislation, shrinking the school district public library service areas, where people were doubly taxed, was the easy way out - regardless of which library came first.

The full scope of the problem needs to be looked at and real - emphasis on real - solutions needs to be explored.

If taxpayers in my service area can save between \$202,000 and \$141,000 depending on how the problem is resolved, how much will taxpayers be able to save statewide? The answer to this question is available. Legislators just need to be a little pro-active to find it.

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