

**Public Hearing on Funding Public Libraries in New York State  
Assembly Standing Committee on Libraries and Education Technology**

Tuesday, November 29, 2011  
Hamilton Hearing Room B  
Legislative Office Building, 2nd Floor  
Albany, New York

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Libraries make a difference in people's lives.  
New York libraries are essential. Library Systems connect our libraries!

Public Library Systems were created in 1959 to help develop public libraries within the State and to assure that residents of the State have equity of access to information regardless of where they live.

From their inception, Public Library Systems were established to consolidate and coordinate services in order to maximize local expenditures for community libraries. Fifty-two (52) years later, RCLS continues to provide consolidated and coordinated services to our 47 member libraries.

The current funding formulas for State Aid to libraries were established in 1990. In 2006-2007 the legislature approved Supplemental Aid, a \$3 million increase in funding for library systems. Supplemental Aid was increased to \$8 million in 2007-2008 and made permanent this year. At full funding, based on Education Law formulas, Supplemental Aid represents an 8.44% increase in State Aid to libraries. Although much appreciated by all library systems this increase pales in light of the loss of spending power due to the rate of inflation since 1990 – 73.24% (US Department of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics CPI Inflation Calculator - <http://data.bls.gov/cgi-bin/cpicalc.pl>). Direct State Aid to public libraries represents only 2.72% of the total.

Prior to my taking over the role of Executive Director in November 2000, RCLS had made it possible for every member library to automate their services, with the last library to do so coming on board in December of 2000. This was made possible by RCLS investing several million dollars and by providing interest free loans to some member libraries. The last of these loans was paid off in 2010.

Unfortunately, shortly after arriving at RCLS it became apparent to me that State Aid was not keeping pace with inflation nor was it being adjusted to accommodate the expansion of automation services required by our member libraries. Working with my staff, member Library Directors and the RCLS Board of Trustees, we eliminated services and reduced staff while turning Automated Network Services into a cost-recovery operation over a period of five years. In spite of the elimination of services, including all rotating collections (audio-visual, adult and children's); Radio Vision our radio reading service for the print impaired (over 25 years on the air); increased efficiency and cost-effectiveness and the reduction of staff by 20%, we are still unable to cover the cost of the programs and services outlined in our Plan of Service.

In 2011 we eliminated another position; significantly reduced the print services we offer to our member libraries (we will eliminate the service in 2012); significantly reduced the amount of print materials we produced and the items we mailed to member libraries and cut our expenditures in nearly every line item. Despite these deep cuts we were still obliged to include over \$170,000 from our unallocated fund reserves to balance our budget.

In addition, the RCLS Board of Trustees implemented a member library service fee that takes effect in 2012. The service fee will help offset the anticipated shortfall in State Aid to libraries in the 2012-2013 State Budget.

The Governor and legislature are talking about moving the State toward an environment in which there is little or no overlap in services – one that emphasizes greater consolidation and cooperation. Library systems throughout the State are exemplary models of this approach to providing services to tax payers in New York.

The services that RCLS provides to our member libraries help them to advance the economies in their service area, enhance the quality of life of their users and to make the best use of resources within their communities.

We deliver high-quality consolidated and cooperative services to support member libraries in meeting the needs of their communities.

As one example of how we work with our member libraries and other local service providers to achieve this mission, let me tell you about the Help for You: Job Consultations Program that RCLS has run over the last three (3) years. We have been able to provide 408 individuals access to job counselors at their local library. Our system has accomplished this in partnership with our member libraries and the Rockland County Guidance Center, Tomorrow's Workplace (Rockland County); Ulster County Office of Employment and Training; Center for Workforce Development (Sullivan County) and Orange Works (Orange County).

Our member libraries are part of the economic development within their communities and RCLS is there to help make that happen.

The RCLS Board of Trustees recognizes that the State faces a difficult economic environment. My Board and I are also only too aware of the many good years this State has had during which library systems did not benefit from the good financial times. During these times we continued to offer our member libraries the consistent, high quality services that we are trying to provide now.

The ROI for State Aid to libraries is \$13 for every \$1 of Aid. I ask, as you look for areas to cut, that you take this into consideration, particularly since total State Aid to libraries represents less than 1/10<sup>th</sup> of one percent of the State Budget.

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The ability of the residents of New York State to remain competitive in the global economy is largely dependent on their ability to access timely and accurate information, to be digitally literate and to have available high speed access to the World Wide Web. Public libraries throughout the State are a vital element in achieving that goal.

Statistics show clearly that during hard times, when people cannot afford to continue their internet services at home; when children have to study at the library because both parents are working; when people require help with job searches and resume writing – library use increases dramatically. Succinctly put, libraries will get us through times of no money better than money will get us through times of no libraries. Help the library systems so that we can continue to efficiently and successfully support New York libraries, help *your* library.

Thank you.