

Testimony of Kevin Verbesev
(Director, Suffolk Cooperative Library System)
Assembly Standing Committee on Libraries and Education
Hearing: Funding Public Libraries in New York State
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Good afternoon, my name is Kevin Verbesev and I am the Director of the Suffolk Cooperative Library System on Long Island. I am also the Chairperson of the New York Library Association's Legislative Committee. I would like to thank you for offering me the opportunity to speak with you today about funding public libraries in New York State.

Public libraries play a critical role in the economic, educational, and cultural lives of the communities and households throughout New York State. New Yorkers over the last three years have turned to their local public libraries in record numbers for access to a wide array of services and support that is not available anywhere else. In Suffolk County the number of visits to libraries, the number of items borrowed from libraries, the number of people signing up to use library computers and internet access have all been at record setting levels during the past few years. Contrary to what some might think or hear public libraries are more relevant to the lives of New Yorkers today than they have ever been.

Libraries are New York's great public workspace. Libraries are about job placement and career advancement. Libraries are the place where New Yorkers turn to get help writing a resume, to search online job listings, and to find out what types of career placement services and government services are available to them. Libraries are the place New Yorkers go to get career counseling, to find listing of job retraining programs and to see what continuing education programs are available. In these times of unemployment and underemployment the public library serves as a vital resource for New York residents facing these uncertain times.

Libraries also serve the small business people of New York. Small businesses are the backbone of the New York economy and it will be our small businesses that will lead us out of the current financial crisis. Small businesses and small business people use their local libraries as their research and development offices. When a small businessperson wants to search for community demographics, or look for retail suppliers or wholesalers, when they need access to high speed internet connections, when they want to find out information about the competition, or when they need to know what new patents or trademarks have been filed or are pending they turn to shared resources of their community library. Many of the resources that a small businessperson might use are available online through the library. These resources are not free and you can not get to them through Google.

An educated workforce is central to New York's economic success and public libraries are a key component of the educational fabric of New York. Public libraries serve as community based lifelong learning centers for all New Yorkers. The formal education

that we receive through our early 20s is no longer good enough to last our lifetimes. Technology drives constant change and there is a never-ending need to prepare New Yorkers to face these new challenges. Libraries do that on a constant basis through making materials, programs and services available to New Yorkers twelve months a year and in many case now with online services twenty four hours a day.

Libraries do not just support the work of our schools but they also enhance it.

In Suffolk County our libraries provide an online homework help service every afternoon and evening that thousands of Suffolk County students use to get help with papers, projects and assignments for school. Our trained librarians support the curriculum of the schools and go beyond it with programming that encourages students to read and develop their curiosity and wonder with resources like summer reading clubs, book contests, and special services and programs for students at all ages and levels of academic achievement.

Libraries are also all about resource sharing and cooperation.

We have all heard so much recently about the need to expand our levels of governmental cooperation in both the provision of services and in appropriate operational functions.

Library systems - like the Suffolk Cooperative Library System - are models of governmental cooperation. Libraries already coordinate services, share resources, and do all of things that any good government advocate would want. Cuts to New York State support for these collaborative efforts is simply pushing costs to the local libraries and taxpayers and if it continues they will have a much more limited ability to save money by working together.

Library Aid, in large part, supports our state's library systems and library systems enable libraries to operate on limited budgets, share resources, borrow books and other items from one another, conduct cooperative purchasing and provide services on a regional or inter-library basis, and yet the very funding that makes this all happen continues to be slashed. It makes absolutely no sense at all.

In Suffolk County we purchase cooperative millions of dollars worth of products and services that are used by libraries around the County. These purchases often save thousands and ten of thousands of dollars over what the cost would be if each individual library needed to purchase something.

In Suffolk County we transport more than 2 million items a year from library to library saving local taxpayers tens of million of dollars in items that do not need to be redundantly purchased.

As you consider remedies to the current financial situation I would ask that you remember the work that our libraries do and the role they will play in improving the

economic well being of New York. I would also ask that you think of the role that our library systems play in consolidating services and keep local taxes down.

Thank you for your time and for your support of New York's libraries and library systems.