

**ASSEMBLY STANDING COMMITTEE ON LIBRARIES AND EDUCATION
TECHNOLOGY**

Public Hearing on Funding Public Libraries in New York State

November 29, 2011

Good Morning. My name is Darby O'Brien and I am the Director of the Utica Public Library, which serves as the Central Library of the Mid-York Library System.

Thank you for this opportunity to speak about New York State funding for libraries. My remarks will focus on public libraries within the Mid-York Library System.

Library Description

The Utica Public Library serves a very diverse community. There is a large refugee/immigrant population as well as large long-standing ethnic communities. There is a high rate of poverty. The Library provides traditional services as well as technology based services and classes. As in many poor communities the Library is a source of free public computing. Through the Broadband Technology Opportunity Program we have been able to extend our hours so that we are now open seven days each week. After years of dismal funding, we are finally able to provide crucial services and collections that are being used daily by eager Uticans.

Public Library Systems

New York State's investment in its Library Systems is the best way that it can support all Libraries. Indeed the Mid-York Library System is vital to the Utica Public Library. This Library depends on the Mid-York Library System for many services: centralized computer system; Internet access; continuing education and training; intra-system delivery that enhances the sharing of resources; payroll support; negotiated discounts for various materials, supplies and services; health insurance purchasing; online databases; downloadable digital content including audio and e-books; book processing; cooperative purchasing. On an annual basis Mid-York saves the Utica Public Library over \$400,000, which equals about 27% of the 2011-12 budget. Through its support of the Mid-York Library System, New York State encourages collaboration, reduces local costs, extends economies of scale and centralizes services.

Over the years I have heard some people question the need for library systems. I do not know what the situations are throughout the state but I can assure you that in Herkimer, Madison and Oneida counties, the Mid-York Library System makes quality library service a reality.

Construction

The Utica Public Library has benefited from the New York State Public Library Construction Program. The Library received over \$300,000 for two projects that totaled close to \$2,000,000. My two suggestions are that this program be revised to cover engineering and architectural costs and that the amount of money available be expanded so that it is equitable to the money allocated to school districts.

Pension Reform

Please make pension reform a high priority as you seek to make changes to the NYS budget. In today's economy it is not defensible to continue the practice of exempting public employees from personal pension contributions after ten years of employment. Please reinstate the contributory system for all employment tiers. This year the Utica Public Library will pay \$92,000 and next \$115,000. Employee contributions would help to alleviate this burden. I will collect a pension that will be based on my last work years, yet my contributions were from my first ten and lowest earning years. That is not fair to the taxpayers of New York State.

Mandate Relief & the Property Tax Cap

In 2012 the Utica Public Library will lose 50% of its funding from Oneida County. In 2013 all public libraries will be eliminated from the County budget. The County's increase in Medicaid will be more than the 2% tax increase will raise. Thus Oneida County will cease funding its public libraries. The only way to avoid this desperate situation for the localities and their public libraries is to enact meaningful mandate relief, especially as it pertains to the funding of Medicaid.

Conclusion

New York State's public libraries are prepared to provide support to all citizens from birth to death. We can give babies and toddlers the skills so that they are ready to read when they enter Kindergarten. We can help students retain their reading levels through our Summer Reading Programs. We can support the new Core Curriculum for public school students. We can provide technology training for the unemployed and underemployed. We can provide literacy opportunities for everyone. We know what to do and how to improve our communities. What we need is the resources. Please do your part by funding our Library Systems. We are governed by the Department of Education. Please treat us as you do other segments of that Department. We are seeking equitable treatment.