My name is Tim Burke and I am the Executive Director of the Upper Hudson Library System. As one of New York’s public library systems, UHLS supports and strengthens the services of the 29 public libraries in Albany and Rensselaer Counties.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today and let me also take the opportunity to publicly thank Assemblyman Reilly for his years of service and his support for New York’s Libraries. Your efforts are very much appreciated.

Today I am speaking to you on behalf of the New York Alliance of Library Systems, the organization that brings together the state’s 73 locally-based library systems. There are three types of library systems serving over 19 million New Yorkers.

- Public library systems that support over 1,000 public libraries and branches libraries
- School library systems that support over 4,500 school library media centers in elementary, middle, and high schools statewide serving 2.8 million pupils, teachers and administrators
- Multi-type reference and research library resources councils that support over 900 academic, research, hospital, cultural, and corporate libraries.

These library systems work together to create a network that connects the more than 7,000 libraries in New York State.
New York Alliance of Library Systems

Library systems were first created in the late 1940s to help libraries achieve economies of scale through resource sharing, collaborative projects, and shared services - all themes that we have been hearing a lot about in current conversations about government efficiency, but library systems have been doing these things for more than 50 years!

As technology and the information environment have changed, library systems have evolved to keep pace with our users needs. Today’s library systems provide their member libraries with:

- innovative IT solutions and services;
- state-wide delivery of research materials (both physical and electronic delivery);
- digitization of unique local resources making them accessible to all New Yorkers;
- sophisticated training and professional development opportunities;
- shared purchasing of e-books and other digital resources;
- collaborative collection development strategies to maximize resource availability

In short, Library systems provide a cost-effective statewide information infrastructure that provides libraries with measurable economies based on shared resources and shared costs.

How does this infrastructure make a positive impact on the people in your home district?

- 98% of New York’s public libraries report that they have helped patrons look for or apply for a job online – using the link to the digital world provided by library systems;
- 70% of New York’s libraries serve as their community’s only option for free Internet access – again a service supported by library systems;
- New York’s libraries circulate more than 160 million items annually – often using the Library Systems’ physical delivery service or Interlibrary Loan service that allows a user to locate and request an item online and have it delivered to any library;
- 95% of NY libraries offer classes and programs that teach their patrons how to connect to the digital world - use computers, access the Internet, apply for jobs online, use e-mail, etc. The librarians teaching these classes developed their skills through professional training programs offered their library system.

It is a fact that Library systems save taxpayers money and enable all libraries to do more – and we have been doing this for more than 50 years.

It is a fact that Library systems provide a structure for cost sharing and collaboration that should be a model for consideration by other governmental services interested in regionalism and economies of scale.

NYALS: Collaborations That Count
New York Alliance of Library Systems

But the specific topic of today’s hearing is the impact of the state budget on library services:

Library systems are funded primarily through state aid to libraries, which has been cut 20% from 2008 levels. These cuts have taken us back to 1996 funding levels.

We can assure you that these cuts are steadily eroding the foundation of New York’s information infrastructure, making it difficult to maintain essential services, programs, and staff. And there is a real danger that this erosion will become permanent as library systems exhaust their modest fund balances, reduce their staff, and discontinue valuable programs.

The New York Alliance of Library Systems has just one legislative priority: the restoration of state aid to libraries to its 2008 amount: $102 million. While we acknowledge that this is a large percentage increase, we also remind you that the $20.4 million required for full restoration represents less than 2/100’s of 1% of the total state budget for 2012.

Restoring Library aid is your opportunity to make an investment in the future of New York State through your support of libraries and library systems. Funding libraries and library systems is an investment in New York’s economic recovery, an investment in New York’s future as a leader in the high tech information economy, an investment in the current and future generations of New York’s children, and an investment that will produce a substantial return and make a lasting positive difference for the people of New York State.

We appreciate this committee’s support and your diligent efforts on behalf of libraries. The New York Alliance of Library Systems encourages the committee as a group and as individual members to recommend and to fight for the restoration of state aid to libraries in the upcoming state budget.

Thank you again for the opportunity to speak with you today.

Timothy G. Burke

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Executive Director
Upper Hudson Library System