

**Statement of Bernard A. Margolis, State Librarian and  
Assistant Commissioner for Libraries,  
New York State Education Department**

Thank you Deputy Commissioner Jeffrey Cannell for the thorough introduction to the state of library services in the Empire State. Libraries are alive, being heavily used in person and online in every part of our great state. In over 1,000 locations libraries are the hubs of community commerce, learning and enterprise.

Today, in my limited time, I want to focus on four critical and timely areas related to New York's libraries and their resources:

- Review the devastation of Hurricane Sandy and her impact on libraries.
- The impact of the federal fiscal cliff and sequestration on critical library services
- The continuing need for library infrastructure investments, and
- The role of our library systems as tools for efficiency in government.

**The Impact of Hurricane Sandy**

Included among the wide devastation inflicted by Superstorm Sandy are major damages suffered by public libraries, academic libraries, and school libraries throughout New York City, Long Island and Westchester County. Damage to buildings, to technology infrastructure, and to collections of books and other materials has been vast.

Assessments continue of the wide ranging damage. Our preliminary information suggests building repair costs beyond those required to "just get the doors open" will be very significant, as will costs to rehabilitate damaged collections.

At the same time, it is vitally important to acknowledge and, in fact, celebrate, the essential role which libraries served in the ravaged areas. Libraries which were able to open, extended their hours, provided places for people to recharge cell-phones, used the internet to connect to families, provided warmth, light, food and in some cases shelter. Libraries helped people deal with water-soaked possessions which for many represented a lifetime of memories and family history. Libraries provided information, access to news, programs to entertain and educate children, emergency information and resources, and offices for FEMA and relief organizations. The public good for which libraries are known was a public good of immense and different proportions. We are fortunate that a corps of dedicated library workers was in place to respond, as they always do, with lifesaving help.

**The Fiscal Cliff and Sequestration**

As with programs throughout the state, the Department is deeply concerned with the consequences of the federal "fiscal cliff" and sequestration. We receive important

federal support through the Library Services and Technology Act and the prospect of sequestration of those federal funds has caused great panic through the library sector.

For example, the popular NOVELNY program which brings a wide range of critical on-line information resources directly to over 5,000 libraries and is accessible to all New Yorkers is supported almost entirely with federal funds. Almost 56 million searches on these databases last year suggests how popular and important these resources are for libraries. Even a relatively small loss of federal funds would force major reductions of this important service. Federal resources support literacy, conservation, technology, as well as critical State Library specialists. It is not realistic to think that reductions in federal support can be absorbed without scaling-back services.

### **Library Infrastructure**

I want to thank you for your support of the Public Library Construction program. The \$14 million annual appropriation over the past 7 years, has leveraged millions more to improve library facilities throughout the state so that they are safe, accessible and efficient.

In the aftermath of Superstorm Sandy it is appropriate to begin thinking and rethinking how we build public facilities to be resilient to the forces of nature that our state has encountered in recent years. When the State Library last surveyed the library community about building and facility needs, we learned that the scope of our overall needs was in the billions of dollars. These ranged from infrastructure improvements to make facilities accessibility compliant, to technology needs, to improved energy efficiencies.

Thanks to your investments, libraries have started and continue to make critical improvements. At a minimum, sustaining these investments will encourage the kind of renewal in library infrastructure that acknowledges the heavy use being made of these facilities and will help libraries plan leverage local resources.

### **Tools for Efficiency in Government**

The design of the system for the delivery of library services in New York is one widely replicated. While the primary point of service delivery is the local library: your local public library, your school library, or your community college or academic library, these local libraries connect through three (3) types of library systems. These systems represent a very efficient and reliable means of sharing resources, providing centralized and cooperative services, and providing specialized services which would otherwise be beyond the reach of any individual library. These often behind the scene services of the library systems are the backbone which permit individual libraries to provide state of the art technology, book and material delivery, publicity and promotion and a wide range of other services, including the highly acclaimed Summer Reading in New York Libraries program in which many members of the Assembly participate.

While our focus has generally been at the local library level – where the rubber meets the road – we cannot ignore the importance of the public library systems, the school

library systems and the Regional Resource and Reference systems. We count on the systems to do more and more in providing service, overseeing quality control and compliance and helping guarantee quality services. We hope we can continue discussing ways to encourage the positive discussions underway between various library systems looking at collaborating, partnering and approaching shared services in new ways. The benefits to the state for incentivizing and rewarding improved efficiencies are great. The systems are essential to library service delivery for all New Yorkers and they need resources to be effective and efficient.

In closing, funding needs nearly always run ahead of available resources. Your past commitments, especially during difficult financial times, have acknowledged the importance of the local library. I recently saw the statement: Cutting library funding in a recession is like closing the hospital during the plague! Our libraries play a role in our economic development and are critical quality of life institutions for New Yorkers. Our libraries serve small businesses, help the unemployed and underemployed find or train for new jobs, and contribute greatly to our goal of ensuring that New Yorkers succeed in college and careers. As you weigh the difficult challenge of 2013, I know you will keep public libraries and the valuable services they provide to New Yorkers and our communities in the forefront of your mind.

Thank you and we are happy to answer questions.