

Testimony to Assembly Standing Committee on Libraries

On the Impact of the 2012-13 State Budget on Public Libraries in the Southern Tier region and

Future needs of our Public Libraries and Library System

November 29, 2012

Legislative Office Building, Albany

Thank you to Chairman Bob Reilly, New York State Assembly Standing Committee on Libraries and Education Technology, and the members and staff of the Committee, for holding this public hearing on the subject of funding public libraries in New York State.

The opportunity to provide testimony is very important, so though I am not able to be in Albany today, I appreciate your consideration of the following points:

- Our libraries and System provide education, programs, and services throughout our region
- We use collaboration, technology, and consolidated services to leverage resources in increasingly effective ways
- Citizens support local tax increases to support local public libraries
- Impact of 2012-2013 state budget on system services and public libraries in the Southern Tier Library System
- Future State funding needs

Our libraries and System are providing education, programs and services throughout our region. Public libraries are education for residents of all ages. Public libraries provide print and online information for preschoolers, students, families, job seekers and entrepreneurs. Because of libraries, story hours and the best books written for children are available to help every family, regardless of income, get their children off to a good start. Libraries help with job preparedness, lifelong education, and computer skills. Libraries provide the computer training needed by many due to the fast pace of technology change, and especially needed by job-seekers who may not have the computer skills to search for jobs, complete applications online, prepare and attach resumes. Libraries are vital community hubs, especially in rural areas, and are heavily used. Southern Tier libraries loaned almost 1.7 million items last year, provided free access to a total of 360 public internet computers which were used by residents 256,000 times, provided programs attended by over 89,000 children and hosted over 1.2 million library visits.

Libraries are the model for using collaboration and technology to better leverage resources and stretch dollars. Library Systems and member libraries work together over big geographical areas. The Southern Tier Library System serves 48 library buildings, provides shared integrated library computer systems, software which makes possible a regional online catalog, supports the shared patron database permitting residents to use any library in the region,

allows libraries to check items out and track them electronically, and enables residents to search over a million books, magazines, DVDs, and other materials online.

Fast and reliable delivery service provided by library systems means that residents don't have to travel further than their local library to get access to materials from throughout the region. In the 3,500 square mile Southern Tier area, System drivers are on the road 300 days a year covering 99,000 miles a year to deliver the books and other library materials requested by residents. Last year over 165,000 library items were shared between and among members of the Southern Tier Library System.

- If each library had to purchase, at an estimated cost of \$20 per item, all of the library materials requested by residents, the total annual cost would be over \$3.3 million in taxpayer dollars.
- If each library had to mail the item to the borrower, at an estimated cost of \$2.75 per item, the annual cost would be over \$453,000.

Rising gas prices make this vital and cost-effective service harder to provide.

Library director Gayle Greuber, Peterson Library, Odessa said, "The Southern Tier Library System maintains the circulation system and facilitates interlibrary loan through STARCat (regional online catalog) and through physical delivery of materials. All of these services are crucial for serving our patrons."

Library systems provide the intellectual capital – know-how, skills, and expertise needed by local libraries to build services for their residents, including:

- Building collaborations with organizations like day care providers, literacy services, and Workforce Development.
- Providing critical support and expertise for planning and implementing technology initiatives
- Strengthening outreach services to families, job seekers, and residents who are elderly, or have physical or learning disabilities

Voters support tax increases for local library services. Since 1998 voters have approved 95% of library budget propositions in the Southern Tier area. All 2012 library propositions were approved; this month Chemung County voters approved a tax increase for the County Library by 70%.

Impact of 2012-2013 state budget on system services and public libraries in the Southern Tier Library System. Since 2008, libraries have sustained deep cuts– six cuts in state funding since 2008, resulting in a 21% reduction of funds and a dramatic impact on System services. Even with local libraries paying more of the cost of shared System services, services have been reduced. Library directors are asking for more – more deliveries, more training, and as one director said "more technical support and help with computer equipment installations to keep our library technology up-to-date."

The 2012 – 2013 State aid budget increase over 2011 is an important beginning to restore library funding.

Future State Funding Needs.

- Increase state public library construction aid to \$50 million and enable libraries to fund last-mile telecommunications connections with state construction funds
- Continue restoration of state aid to libraries to 2008 levels to strengthen library services

Libraries and Library Systems work together to strengthen New York Communities

State funds supplement local funds, enable libraries to provide 21st century services, multiply resources, and expand shared services. Shared system services strengthen libraries, build communities, support economic development and enable every resident to have equal access to excellent library services.

Thank you very much for your consideration of these remarks.

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