Testimony of the New York Alliance of Library Systems to the Assembly Standing Committee on Libraries and Educational Technology December 13, 2016

Delivered by Tim Burke, Upper Hudson Library System

My name is Tim Burke and I am the Executive Director of the Upper Hudson Library System.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today and let me also take the opportunity to publicly thank the members of this committee for your interest in libraries and library service and to specifically acknowledge Assemblyman Abinanti for his passionate work on behalf of the New York Library Community. Your individual and collective efforts are very much appreciated.

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.

But 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 providing service to EVERY resident of the Empire State.

- Public library systems that support over 1,000 public libraries and branches libraries throughout the state
- 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 – an information infrastructure - that effectively connects the more than 7,000 libraries in New York State.

Library systems were first created in the 1950s 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 it is important to note that library systems have been blazing that trail for more than 60 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;
- access to grant funding programs such as the NYS Public Library Construction grants;
- shared purchasing of e-books and other digital resources;
- state-wide delivery of research materials (both physical and electronic delivery);
- digitization of unique local resources making them accessible to all New Yorkers;
- sophisticated "best practice" training and professional development opportunities; and
- 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 through 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 150 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 New York libraries offer classes and programs that teach their students or 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 60 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.

But it is also a fact that state funding to support this powerful statewide information infrastructure must be increased.

Which brings me to the specific topic of today's hearing - the impact of the state budget on library services:

The powerful information infrastructure just described is funded primarily through state aid to libraries. Thanks to the support of the Assembly and the Senate, we've made some incremental progress in increasing funding for libraries and library systems in recent years.   But the Library Aid line in the current enacted budget is at $95.6

million, which is still $7 million short of the full formula funding level of $102.6 million.   And that full funding amount is almost $30 million short when you apply a simple inflation calculation. In fact, with inflation taken into account, the current funding level is equivalent to 2002 library funding levels.

As you have heard already and will continue to hear today, the library systems in our state are models of efficiency and positive return on investment, but you cannot expect us to provide New Yorkers with 21st Century services with 2002 funding levels.

We are hearing a lot lately about infrastructure erosion around the state… I can assure you that struggling year after year with inadequate funding is steadily eroding the foundation of New York's information infrastructure, making it difficult to maintain essential services, programs, and staff.   And every year 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: state aid to libraries must be increased to the full formula amount of $102.6 million.

Help us get there. Increasing 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 educational infrastructure, an investment in New York's future as a leader in the high tech information economy, an investment in both 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 speak up and fight for more state aid to libraries in the upcoming state budget negotiations.

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

Timothy G. Burke

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