

To: Assembly Committee on Libraries and Education Technology
Re: Public Hearing – The Impact of the 2016-2017 State Budget on Public Libraries
Date: December 13, 2016

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today concerning the funding of public libraries and public library systems in New York State. My name is Terry Kirchner and I am the Executive Director of the Westchester Library System (WLS). Presenting with me today is Robert A. Caluori, Jr., the WLS Director of Information Technology. WLS is a cooperative public library system comprised of 38 member public libraries. All of these libraries are located within the geographic boundaries of Westchester County.

2016-2017 Public Library Funding

The New York State 2016-2017 funding appropriation for WLS and its member libraries is just over \$2.6 Million. The Local Library Services Aid portion of system funding payable directly to the member libraries is approximately \$268,000, or ten percent (10%) of the overall Library Aid allocation received by WLS. The member libraries use these Local Library Services Aid funds to support their operations and meet their minimum service standards – such as the number of hours that the library is open to serve the public.

New York Education Law section 273 sets the Local Library Services Aid rate at \$0.31 per capita of the population. A simple \$0.05 increase to \$0.36 per capita (assuming NYS population of 19.8 million) would cost less than \$1 million yet have a significant impact on public libraries to better serve their communities' needs.

The New York State Library Aid allocated to WLS is used to provide system-wide services to the communities served by our member libraries at no additional cost to the member libraries or their communities. These services include cataloging of materials; consulting and training services for trustees and staff; the administering and coordinating of system-wide grants and purchases; maintenance of the online library system that allows shared access to over 5 Million books, DVDs and CDs; and outreach to underserved populations.

The increase in funding was instrumental in our efforts to expand our outreach to underserved populations. Two programs related to adult literacy have grown over the past year and the need far exceeds our ability to meet the demand. **HSE Connect!** pairs adult learners with trained volunteers. These volunteers help learners more successfully prepare for and pass the high school diploma equivalency test in New York State. The trained volunteers assist learners by explaining the exam and all its parts, reviewing an individual's options to prepare – from prep classes to self-study tools, helping learners actually get started, and when necessary tutor in specific topics.

Westchester Connections is an online resource intended for anyone who was formerly incarcerated and is now working through probation or parole. It includes encouragement, information and guidance on topics such as knowing one's rights after incarceration, accessing legal services and help with raising children. Through this resources are able to independently connect with available community resources for food, clothing, housing, health, jobs and education. The site also offers the option to "Ask Us a Question" through form-based email and several hours each week of live chat Q&A.

This year we also launched our **WLS Welcome Card**. This library system service is a six-month (renewable) library card that case managers and probation officers can activate. This card assures that, even though housing may be uncertain, so long as the individual is returning to Westchester County, they can access needed resources at any of the 38 public libraries in the county. A future direction that we are exploring based on our success of the Welcome Card concerns approaches to make it easier for all individuals in Westchester to get public library cards through other existing service points such as public school systems and departments of motor vehicles or to have reciprocal rights with other public library systems in the region.

The additional funding is also providing opportunities to support member library activities related to **e-books**. In particular we try to work with and support vendors with the shared goal of reducing barriers to e-content. So far our efforts have focused on identifying e-content providers such as Total Boox. This product has allowed WLS to provide system-wide access for just \$0.62 per item checked out. Over the past year we averaged 4,300 checkouts per month. This service has been supported in part by **Central Library** funds that are allocated to each public library system based on guidelines in *§90.4 Standards for central libraries*. Currently each public library system is required to have at least one physical site identified as the Central Library. Removing the need for each public library system to maintain a physical Central Library location and a physical Central Library collection could better reflect the public library's role as a digital innovator and information leader.

State Aid for Library Construction

This year's increase in State Aid for Library Construction allowed 19 WLS member libraries to move forward on activities that they might not otherwise be able to afford. Approximately \$888,790 was available for WLS member libraries to use toward construction activities during the 2016-2019 time period.

The matching construction grant awards have been used for a range of projects including the replacement of old roofs, library renovations for more efficient and ADA-compliant spaces, and upgrades and replacements to HVAC systems. All of these projects help the libraries provide their communities with safe, Wi-Fi compatible, comfortable places to learn, conduct business and engage with others. Libraries are far from dead and are a good investment in every community. We thank you again for your ongoing support and advocacy on our behalf.

Respectfully submitted,



Terry L. Kirchner, PhD
Executive Director