

**Testimony before Assembly Committee on Libraries and Education Technology
Hon. Didi Barrett, Chairperson
At Albany, NY on January 10, 2018**

Presented by Wanda R. Bruchis, Mid York Library System Executive Director

Chairwoman Barrett and esteemed Assembly Members who also serve on this Committee: Brian Barnwell, Inez E. Dickens, Yuh-Line Niou, Steven Otis, Philip A. Palmesano, Michaelle C. Solages, and Mary Beth Walsh.

Thank you for inviting me to speak today. My name is Wanda Bruchis and I am the Executive Director of the Mid York Library System, Utica, NY. Chartered in 1960 by the Board of Regents, Mid York serves a population of 372,839 in a geographic area of 3,279 square miles. To give you an idea of the popularity of our services, 249,109 people have library cards – that’s almost 70% of our population.

Mid York has a cooperative arrangement with 43 autonomous public libraries. Its mission statement is to “improve and expand library services in the counties of Herkimer, Madison and Oneida Counties.” Our priorities include:

- Lowering library service cost by leveraging economies of scale for activities common to our libraries
- Increasing residents’ abilities to access material from any library in our service area and beyond through a shared catalog and distribution process
- Extending each member library’s ability to deliver comprehensive services by offering professional consulting and assistance
- Broadening our libraries’ abilities to offer free access to digital information and on-line services to their community members
- Deliver direct service to community members unable to readily access their local library

I understand that the Committee is interested in learning about the services and programs libraries are providing their local communities, and, how libraries are collaborating and using technology to better leverage their resources. The Committee is also seeking testimony to determine the future funding needs of public libraries and the NYS Public Library Construction Grant.

The funding increase included in the 2017-18 state budget has had a positive impact on fulfilling our mission and priorities. Increased funding has allowed Mid York to initiate long overdue but essential activities while continuing to provide others that were at risk of being eliminated or further delayed. Examples include:

- IT Department-Upgraded bandwidth in all 43 libraries to 100 mbps
- Business Office-Continue to subsidize payroll services for over half of our libraries (24)

Specific to Oneida County residents, the following programs are initiated by Mid York and sponsored by the County. Mid York is also reaching out to both Herkimer and Madison counties to potentially duplicate these targeted initiatives as a way to continually involve our other governmental partners in increasing up-to-date library services.

- Books for Babies-Babies born in Oneida County hospitals receive a free book accompanied by information on the 21 public libraries located in the County. Engaging parents in the important process of exposing their children to print at an early age helps them be ready to read and write, giving them a better chance at being on grade level by third grade, a pivotal point on a child's education.
- Summer Reading Program Free Books-Libraries in Oneida County will distribute new, free books to participants enrolled in the Summer Reading Program instilling the love of reading, supporting their early literacy and then their fluency.
- Enhance digital eBooks and digital audiobook collections-Digital resources can give Oneida County a competitive advantage in attracting millennials to live here and give others a reason to come back. Digital resources are available on a nursing home resident's iPad, preschooler's Kindle, and even in offices that serve the old, the young and everyone in between. Every resident in the County has access, making them the great equalizer regardless of proximity to a physical library. The eBooks have print that can be enlarge and audio titles are compatible with people whose vision has deteriorated to the point that it is no longer possible to read.

We are still, however, a long way away from recovery from the drastic measures we had to absorb due to the funding cuts in 2008-09 all the while struggling to provide costly 21st century services to stay relevant to our changing public. With increased funding, new initiatives include developing a system-wide marketing plan to promote the array of resources and activities available through our libraries and online, and to enhance current training opportunities offered to member library staff and their boards.

The Committee expressed interest in determining the future funding needs of the NYS Public Library Construction Grant. Libraries and systems are very appreciative of the \$5 million increase in the 2017-20 NYS Public Library Grant program. This represents an increase of \$144,677 for Mid York libraries bringing our total allocation to \$694,451. Yet the applications submitted were more than doubled that. Other applicants dropped out over concern that the amount of their awards would be so small that the required matching contribution would be beyond their budgeted means. Projects ranged from building an entire new library facility to rehabilitating existing buildings to increase energy efficiencies or improve services by replacing roofs, HVAC units, upgrading lighting and adding new spaces. Included are a few pictures, submitted by our libraries as part of the Construction Grant application requirements. Our library community infrastructure also needs re-building just as our roads, highways and bridges do.

2016 Annual Report Statistics demonstrates the value of services provided by Mid York Library System and its 43 member libraries:

- Nearly 1,700,000-Visits to Mid York Library System libraries
- 310,781-Users of the 383 public internet computers
- 1,606,450-Circulation of 2,025,669 library materials
- 1,224-Number of Summer Reading Program (SRP) events
- 26,521-Number of people attending SRP events

While these numbers are impressive, they do not tell the whole story.

Lisa Matte, Director of the Jervis Public Library, Rome, recently relayed this to me:

A woman was in the Computer Lab praying about how she was going to get her high school equivalency because she had four children and a job and could not make it to the classes at a local agency. She got up the courage to go to the Information Desk to ask for help. The librarian at the desk called me when he heard it was a math question, and I went down to help her. We ended up meeting once a week for the next three weeks. I explained a concept to her, she did her homework, and she then she came back and we went over it and moved on to the next topic. It turned out that this was the third time to take the math part, the only part she had failed, and it was her last chance of the year because you could only take each portion three times in one year. After our third meeting, she took the test and I didn't hear from her again. During the process, she also brought her son in to introduce her reason she was doing this.

Then my phone rang and she reported that she had passed. Not only did she pass, she passed by 80 points! Later in the month, she was behind me in the line at the grocery store and she gushed to the cashier about what I had done for her. She said things like, "Do you know what she did for me?" "She is a really nice lady." Then she told the cashier about her experience and how the library made a real difference in her life.

These scenarios are not unique at Jervis, nor is it unique to Lisa. This is what libraries do every day.

Thank you for your attention and partnership.

Respectfully Submitted,



Wanda R. Bruchis

Utica Public Library Boiler-Before and After



Jordanville Public Library Fireplace Base-Before and After

