



New York Alliance of Library Systems

Testimony of the New York Alliance of Library Systems to the Assembly Standing Committee on Libraries and Educational Technology January 10, 2018

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. I also have the honor of serving as the current President of the New York Library Association.

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 your work on behalf of all New Yorkers.

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 serving the 457,000 New Yorkers in our service area.

My public library system colleagues are here today to speak specifically about public library systems, but today I am here to speak 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. To provide some background - there are three types of library systems in New York State



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and together they connect EVERY resident of the Empire State to information and library services.

- The 23 Public library systems that support over 1,000 public libraries and branches libraries throughout the state
- The 41 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
- The 9 Multi-type reference and research library resources councils that support over 900 academic, research, hospital, cultural, and corporate libraries.

Together these library systems collaborate to create a network – an information infrastructure - that connects the more than 7,000 libraries in New York State to each other....and effectively connects every New Yorker to the information they need.

Library systems were first created in the 1950s by the NYS Legislature 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 you know, the information environment we all live and work in has changed dramatically since the 1950's, but library systems have evolved to



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keep in front of our user's needs. Today's library systems provide their member libraries with:

- innovative IT solutions and services;
- shared opportunities for broadband and Wi-Fi access;
- shared purchasing of e-books and other digital resources;
- state-wide delivery of library resources (both physical and electronic delivery);
- digitization of unique local resources making them accessible to all New Yorkers;
- access to grant funding programs such as the NYS Public Library Construction grants;
- sophisticated “best practice” training and professional development opportunities; and
- collaborative collection development strategies to maximize resource availability.

Simply put, library systems provide a cost-effective statewide information infrastructure that provides libraries with real and measurable economies based on shared resources and shared costs. According to a study by the NYS Education Department, for every 1 dollar of state money invested in library systems, local communities, schools, campuses, and users realize 7 dollars in services. Any way you look at those numbers, this represents smart investment of NYS taxpayer dollars.



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How does this infrastructure make a positive impact on the people in your home district?

- More than 90% 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 public libraries serve as their community's only option for free Internet access – again a service supported by library systems;
- New York's libraries of all types 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
- All of New York's libraries (schools, college, university, public) provide the leading role in teaching their students or their patrons how to connect effectively, efficiently, and perhaps most importantly, safely to the digital world - use computers, access the Internet, apply for jobs online, use e-mail, etc. The librarians and library staff teaching these classes and delivering this one-on-one training, developed their skills through professional training programs offered their library system.



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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 duplication 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 for it to remain effective and efficient.

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

The robust information infrastructure I've just described is funded primarily through state aid to libraries. Thanks to the support of the Assembly and the Senate, we've made incremental progress in increasing funding for libraries and library systems in recent years. But the Library Aid line in the NYS Budget is currently at \$95.6 million, which is still \$7 million short of the full formula funding level of \$102.6 million. And when you apply a simple inflation calculation, that full funding amount is almost **\$35 million short** of where it should be in 2017 dollars. The sad fact is that, with inflation taken into account, **the current funding level is equivalent in real dollars to 2006 library funding levels.**



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As you have heard already and will continue to hear from my colleagues around the state at today's hearing, the library systems in our state are models of efficiency and a positive return on investment, but you cannot expect us to provide New Yorkers 21st Century library and information services with 2006 funding levels.

We are hearing a lot lately about infrastructure erosion around the state - bridges, roads, sewers, water mains, etc. I can assure you that struggling year after year with inadequate funding is steadily eroding the foundation of New York's information infrastructure. Each year that funding does not grow, it makes it more difficult to maintain essential services, programs, and staff; and curtails our ability to innovate and introduce new services. And every year the danger grows that this erosion will become permanent as library systems exhaust their modest fund balances, reduce their staff, and are forced to 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 and all of its citizens 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



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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 New York's libraries and library systems. The New York Alliance of Library Systems encourages the committee as a body and each of you as individual members to speak up in conference and on the floor 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.

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