



January 10, 2018

Testimony of the Capital District Library Council to the Assembly Standing Committee on Libraries and Education Technology

Hello. I'm Kathleen Gundrum, Executive Director of the Capital District Library Council. On behalf of the directors of New York's library systems, thank you for the invitation to present testimony regarding the effectiveness of library systems across New York State and the value they provide.

Based in Albany, the Capital District Library Council is one of the state's nine Reference and Research Resources Councils that comprise the Empire State Library Network. We support and provide services to New York's libraries and archives to ensure equal access to information for all New Yorkers. We are a multi-type system and one of the three library system types in New York – the other two are public library systems and school library systems – funded through Library System Aid.

Empire State Library Network members include all types of libraries: public and school, college and university, hospitals, museums, historical societies, government agencies, and corporates. We work with these organizations regionally and statewide to achieve measurable economies of scale and increased quality of services that a single library or a single library system cannot achieve on their own. Without your support, we cannot sustain the services our members depend on.

With the state funding we receive, libraries have access to a variety of services that reduce their costs and enable them to perform their jobs effectively and efficiently. We support members locally:

- By providing teams of experienced librarians who provide support, training, and consultation for digitization, collection management, health/medical library management, research, and resource sharing services to libraries.
- By distributing grants to members, allowing them to expand their physical and digital library collections. This includes digital images, special collections, archival material, and historic newspapers.
- By providing professional development and forums such as workshops, conferences, and interest groups so that librarians and library staff are well-trained and up-to-date on needed skills.
- By negotiating for and offering discounts to electronic resources and other services on behalf of our members, which reduces costs and saves staff resources.
- By administering programs and providing tools that allow libraries to share their physical and digital collections.
- By hosting catalogs for museum and hospital libraries.

- By providing tools and resources for lending and borrowing library items from each other, statewide, nationally, and even internationally.
- By providing legal information on copyright and licensing concerns.
- And, by developing pilot projects to test innovative technologies and services that expand access to information for all New Yorkers.

At the statewide level, we connect our members to the broader library community through the Empire State Library Network. The nine councils were created more than 50 years ago to foster collaboration and cooperation within our outlined regions. The Empire State Library Network was created a decade ago to foster collaboration across regions and councils. Our unique structure provides entry for cultural organizations of all types and sizes into collaborations and shared services.

ESLN provides services to enhance the ability of its members to better serve their users. Our products and services share certain common characteristics: they are developed and implemented collaboratively, address needs of our members, are scalable to address growth and new participants, and are sustainable either through participation fees or financial support from the Network and/or one of its nine members. We act as “one entity” on behalf of all nine Councils.

The purposes of the Empire State Library Network are to:

- Improve library services in New York
- Increase cooperation and resource sharing among libraries and library systems in New York
- Support improved economic development, healthcare, and information technology through libraries in New York

The guiding principles that assist us in successfully pursuing our goals include:

- Achieving more together by connecting existing systems and services to create stronger and better models.
- Spotlighting New York State’s rich collections by facilitating collection curation.
- Influencing the evolution of the NYS information landscape by educating for innovation.

The Empire State Library Network has a tradition of providing services that are best-positioned at the statewide level to help libraries achieve cost-savings and to streamline resources. Due to our organizational structure, we are able to facilitate collaboration among and between all types of libraries and cultural heritage organizations throughout New York State.

Current examples of our collaborative efforts include:

- Empire Library Delivery, a statewide delivery system that transports thousands of items between libraries. Libraries are able to share books, reduce duplication, and realize cost- and time-savings with predictable shipping rates.
- Ask Us 24/7, a virtual reference service enabling our members to provide real-time research services around the clock, and includes participants from around the world.

- Working with librarians through the Hospital Library Services Program to provide physicians and clinicians the information resources they need in a timely, sometimes urgent, manner directly impacting patient care.
- Supporting digitization efforts of unique and rare collections for researchers through shared platforms like New York Heritage, New York State Historic Newspapers and Empire Archival Discovery Collaborative. These platforms provide all New Yorkers free access to library collections that include photographs, letters, diaries, directories, maps, newspapers, and books about New York history and people who impacted the state in some way.

In providing and supporting these digital platforms, our work is far-reaching. These services:

- Provide K-12 school students and teachers access to primary resource materials for classroom assignments and support the Open Educational Resources movement
- Support diversity and inclusiveness initiatives by providing access to incredibly diverse and historically significant information
- Enhance community identities and connect us to our roots by sharing the history of towns, villages, and cities online
- Provide quality content to transfer across the broadband connections that the Governor and legislators have proposed to build across the state

Sharing resources and providing the infrastructure means New York’s libraries are able to provide essential services. To continue these vital services, the Empire State Library Network asks the Committee on Libraries and Education Technology to continue its investment in library systems and their member libraries through the restoration of state aid to library systems. As demonstrated above, libraries and library systems are models of shared services and collaborative planning, and we are able to stretch our dollars as far as possible.

However, our funding has been static and if you take inflation into account, we are severely underfunded. The total state funding in the FY2016-17 enacted budget was \$95.6M, placing library aid at 2006 state funding levels. When considering the impact of inflation, the value of \$95.6M from 2006 would be worth \$116M today. It is clear that we aren’t funded at that desired level. We are asking that you comply with New York State Education Law that requires Library Aid for FY 2017-2018 to be \$102.6M. Additionally, we encourage you to increase library aid in proportion to increases in education funding, which has better kept pace with inflation. Libraries are education for everyone, and with your support our library systems provide educational and research services to all citizens of New York.

We appreciate the increase to public construction aid in the 2017/2018 budget – this is vital funding to help public libraries provide contemporary and technologically fitted spaces for our diverse communities. However, all systems – public, school, and the multi-type regional councils- need to see an increase in operational aid in order to continue providing necessary services to our constituents.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today and thank you for your interest in and support of New York’s libraries and library systems.

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