

ASSEMBLY STANDING COMMITTEE ON LIBRARIES AND EDUCATION TECHNOLOGY

Public Hearing on Funding Public Libraries in New York State

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Hamilton Hearing Room B
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Statement

Jeffrey W. Cannell
Deputy Commissioner for Cultural Education and Acting State Librarian
New York State Education Department

New Yorkers love their neighborhood library. Some 118 million New Yorkers used a public library in the past year, taking home over 166 million items. Recently the *Buffalo News* featured a 93-year-old woman who has used her Buffalo and Erie County Public library card for over 80 years. <http://www.buffalonews.com/city/communities/south-buffalo/article633967.ece> She is only one of the 10.6 million New Yorkers that are proud library card holders.

New York's Libraries – Meeting Community Needs

New Yorkers are proud of their neighborhood library. Most New Yorkers have a lot to be proud of, whether it's:

- the fabulous research collections and cutting edge mobile Apps developed by the world-renowned New York Public Library (<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/06/26/nyregion/new-apps-from-the-new-york-public-library.html>);
- the award-winning Queens Library's Helen M. Marshall Children's Library Discovery Center, an exciting new world class children's library – the only public library in the U.S. to incorporate interactive museum exhibits into a traditional reading-rich library environment and the only free children's educational destination in NYC with a special emphasis on science, technology, math and engineering. (http://www.qgazette.com/news/2011-09-21/Front_Page/Helen_M_Marshall_Childrens_Library_Discovery_Cente.html);
- the fabulous Middle Country Library in Suffolk County, with an outstanding early literacy program that is the national model for *Family Place Libraries* (http://www.mcpl.lib.ny.us/familyplace_info.html);
- the public computing center in the Plattsburgh Public Library that is offering job search support, digital literacy training, free access to computers and high-speed Internet broadband and videoconferencing services for the residents of a geographically isolated community (http://www.nysl.nysed.gov/libdev/nybbexpress/pr/ppl_nctw110223.pdf);

- the Pine Grove Middle School of the East Syracuse Minoa Central School District, winner of the 2011 National School Library Program of the Year, where the school librarian plays a vital role providing students with learning experiences that embrace real world connections, interdisciplinary work and community partnerships (<http://www.esmschools.org/news.cfm?story=1203&school=66>); or
- top-notch, award-winning college libraries like the B. Thomas Golisano Library at Roberts Wesleyan College in Rochester provide superior customer service and are at the heart of intellectual inquiry, supporting teaching, faculty and student research, and collaboration on and off campus. (<http://www.rrlc.org/tabid/798/Default.aspx>).

These are only a few examples of the exciting things happening in New York libraries today. I could go on and on, because in my job as Deputy Commissioner for Cultural Education and Acting State Librarian, I have the great pleasure of learning about and seeing firsthand the many exciting programs and services New York libraries are offering to meet the changing needs of their communities.

State-Supported Library Systems – Shared Services Benefit New Yorkers

Most New Yorkers are well aware of the wide range of services offered by their local library. If you are one of the approximately one million New Yorkers who does not yet have a neighborhood public library, then you are most likely benefiting from a State-supported public library system. Because of the public library system, you are able to make full use of other libraries in neighboring communities.

Many New Yorkers are not aware of the State-supported library information infrastructure that helps their local library. This State-supported infrastructure includes the New York State Library, the library systems and some 7000 local libraries.

New York’s Libraries – A Primer

Library systems work at regional levels to improve local library programs and services for all New Yorkers. Systems offer continuing education and resource sharing programs no one library could afford on its own. New York has three types of library systems – **Public Library Systems** (23); **Reference and Research Library Resources Systems** (9); and **School Library Systems** (41).

Public libraries are established and funded locally by municipalities, districts or associations. There are 756 public libraries with over 1,000 outlets serving New Yorkers. A public library district is a type of public library in which the community elects the library’s governing board and votes on the library’s budget.

School, academic and special libraries are at the heart of their parent institutions. Every K-12 public school is required to have a library. The academic library is the center of learning on college and university campuses. Over 1,600 special libraries serve employees of government, hospitals, law firms, businesses and others.

Because of the State Library and the State-supported organizations called “library systems,” New Yorkers may freely access library materials and services that many communities would not otherwise be able to afford. The State Library and the library systems use public and private funds to help libraries collaborate and better leverage local resources. This important State-supported partnership results in more equitable levels of library service across New York State. This partnership also results in programs that bring library services to those New Yorkers with special needs such as persons with physical and learning disabilities, the institutionalized, the educationally disadvantaged and others who have difficulty in accessing traditional library services.

You will hear testimony today that emphasizes the critical roles that New York’s library systems play in providing cost-effective, shared regional services that achieve tremendous economies of scale for local libraries and local taxpayers. Cooperative services provided through New York’s library systems benefit New York’s students, parents, entrepreneurs, authors, researchers, teachers, health practitioners, job seekers and more.

You will hear testimony today that speaks to the critical importance of the State-supported library information infrastructure to the quality of life and the health of the economy in our State. And you will learn that with the right policies, the right tools, and with your leadership and support, our libraries can and will do even more for New Yorkers.

Libraries Offer Learning Spaces and Learning Places

As highly visible community anchor institutions, libraries provide both informal and formal learning spaces – in the library – and online. This is true for whichever community a library serves – a town, city or village; an elementary, middle or high school; a community college or major university or a hospital or corporation.

Libraries strive to ensure **digital inclusion** for all of our citizens – so every New Yorker will be **digitally literate** and able to freely access online information and online education opportunities, regardless of where they live or their economic circumstances.

- 72.5% of New York’s **public libraries are the only free source of Internet access** in their communities. This number is significantly higher in rural communities where broadband access continues to be an issue for residents.
- 94.6% of New York’s public libraries offer IT and other technical training to **help people acquire 21st century skills**.
- Libraries are leaders in expanding WiFi and broadband access for the public. Yet **80% of libraries do not yet have the high-speed broadband connections they need** to serve the public.
- New Yorkers with disabling conditions rely on the library for special equipment to access the Internet services they need.

In order to ensure digital inclusion for all New Yorkers, the State Education Department has established a modest long-term connectivity goal for public libraries:

Every public library building in the State will have adequate, affordable and sustainable connectivity capacity, with a minimum of 100Mbps to each library building by the year 2015.

This goal is congruent with other State and Federal agency goals, such as the Governor's Office for Technology (OFT), *NY State Universal Broadband Strategic Roadmap* (see www.cio.ny.gov/assets/documents/Final_Broadband_Strategy_June2009.pdf) and the SED *Statewide Learning Technology Plan* (see <http://www.p12.nysed.gov/technology/techplan/>). It is also in line with the *National Broadband Plan* developed by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC). The FCC plan's long-term goals include providing 100Mbps to U.S. homes and affordable access to at least 1 gigabit per second to community anchor institutions such as public libraries.

Reaching the 2015 connectivity goal is critically important for New Yorkers that depend on their community libraries for free broadband Internet access, but remains a huge challenge for most of New York's libraries. In 2009 none of the 1,074 public library facilities in New York State were connected at the recommended 100 Mbps level.

It is encouraging that the percentage of New York libraries with connection speeds of greater than 10 Mbps grew in 2010 from 14.4% to 20.1%, and five public libraries now report having 100 Mbps fiber connections.

A 10 Mbps connection distributed over multiple computers at a public library facility and also supporting wireless connectivity and videoconferencing services is not adequate in 2011. If New York's libraries are going to be able to meet growing customer needs, they will need to rapidly expand their broadband capacity in the next few years.

Libraries Are Critical for Career and College Readiness

New York libraries are central to helping young people and adults achieve career and college readiness. New York libraries are central to achieving an educated workforce that engages in lifelong learning. Public libraries have experienced remarkable increases in attendance, book circulation and computer use in the past few years.

- Libraries play a critical role in delivering **early literacy** services.
 - In 2010, nearly 1.6 million New Yorkers (children from Birth to School Age and parents or caregivers) attended public library early literacy sessions.
 - In 2011, with your help, over 1.6 million young people participated in *Summer Reading at New York Libraries* at 1,100 neighborhood libraries – a 10% increase.

- More than 75% of parents of **home-school students** use the public library to support their children’s education.
- Libraries offer **basic literacy**, English as a Second Language, GED support and work force skills training to adults.
 - Over 266,000 New Yorkers attended sessions for English Speakers of Other Languages at the library in 2010.
- The **unemployed** and underemployed continue to turn to public libraries.
 - 77.6% of New York libraries report that staff members have helped jobseekers access and use employment resources (job searches, resumes, submitting online applications).
- Libraries are helping **entrepreneurs** develop business plans, and providing value-added services to businesses that will aid in job creation.
 - (For an exceptional example: Miller Business Resource Center of the Middle Country Public Library on Long Island: <http://www.millerbusinesscenter.org/>)

Libraries Help New Yorkers Achieve Great Things

Libraries, the “people’s university,” are uniquely capable of helping New Yorkers “think out of the box.” Libraries can help New Yorkers leverage existing knowledge in order to achieve great things. Libraries can help New Yorkers come together and work collectively to create new ideas, to reinvent themselves, thus revitalizing our local communities and our great State.

The State has a critical role to play in making sure our libraries and library systems have the resources they need to keep their doors open and to meet the public’s ever-increasing appetite for more reading and study materials, more formal and informal learning opportunities, more and faster e-devices and e-resources.

New Yorkers cannot wait until economic recovery arrives to have better communities and better libraries. New Yorkers need strong libraries now, so they can make that economic recovery happen for themselves, their families and for future generations.