



THE STATE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT / THE UNIVERSITY OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK

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**Statement of Beth Berlin, Executive Deputy Commissioner,
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Good Morning Chairman Abinanti and members of the Assembly present here today. My name is Beth Berlin and I am the Executive Deputy Commissioner of the State Education Department. I am pleased to be here today to testify on behalf of the Board of Regents, Commissioner of Education MaryEllen Elia, and the State Education Department. I am joined by Assistant Commissioner Bernie Margolis, the State Librarian.

I want to thank you and your colleagues for the \$4 million increase in state aid provided to our libraries and library systems in last year's state budget. Your investment in libraries and library systems are an acknowledgement of their importance not only as educational, local and cultural institutions, but as contributors to our economy.

The State Library, library systems, and individual libraries work together to allow New Yorkers to freely access library materials and services that many communities would not otherwise be able to afford. While the primary point of service delivery is your local public library, school, college, or special library, these local libraries connect through three types of library systems. These systems represent a very efficient and reliable means of sharing resources, providing centralized and cooperative services, and providing specialized services which would otherwise be beyond the reach of any individual library. These, often behind the scene services of the library systems, are the backbone which permit 7,000 individual libraries to provide state of the art technology, book and material delivery, publicity and promotion and a wide range of other services, including the *Summer Reading at New York Libraries* program in which many members of the legislature participate.

Summer Reading is one of the most popular programs of the State Library. The State Library offers high-quality educational materials and supports which are tailored by libraries to fit local needs. Schools are strongly encouraged to collaborate with their local public library to keep students engaged in reading and learning during the summer months in order to avoid the "summer slide." The Commissioner has made it a priority to increase participation in this program, and this past summer we crossed an important threshold: 2.1 million children participated in the summer reading program, which was approximately a 6 percent increase over 2015 participation levels, and almost double the participation rate of a decade ago. Working together in partnership, we should all strive to ensure our libraries have stable and sustainable funding, allowing programs like Summer Reading to continue to grow.

Thanks to your efforts, current funding for Library Aid now stands at \$95.6 million. The Regents recommend that as part of this coming state budget you provided the statutory amount of funding, which would result in a \$102.6 million funding level. The State Library and the library systems will continue to use public and private funds to help libraries collaborate and better leverage and extend the reach of these resources.

I also want to thank you for your support of the State Aid for Library Construction Program by providing an additional \$5 million in this past year's budget. Your investment in this program

over the years has leveraged millions more to improve public library facilities throughout the state so that they are safe, accessible, and efficient. However, funding needs nearly always run ahead of available resources, and this year is no different. There remains a pressing need for additional state support.

A recent Needs Assessment survey conducted by the State Library indicates an estimated cost for basic public library construction and renovation in New York State at over \$1.7 billion for the next four years. The 2015 survey data shows that:

- Over 51 percent of the over 1,000 public library buildings in New York are over 60 years old, and 31 percent are between 30 and 60 years old;
- Approximately 22 percent are not fully accessible to wheelchairs; and
- Many public libraries need to upgrade electrical and wiring for public access computers and broadband infrastructure and do not have sufficient space to house the library's collection.

Thanks to a change to state law in 2015, broadband infrastructure is now an eligible cost under the State Aid for Library Construction Program. The state's libraries are still nowhere near reaching the long-term connectivity goal for public libraries approved by the Regents in 2012 that every public library building in the state will have adequate, affordable and sustainable connectivity capacity, with a minimum of 100 megabits per second to each library building by the year 2015. Recent data indicates only about 4 percent of public library buildings have a broadband connection that meets this minimum standard. These inadequate connections are distributed over multiple computers and also support wireless connectivity and teleconferencing services.

The Board of Regents recommend as part of this year's budget priorities an increase in annual funding for the State Aid for Library Construction program from \$19 million to \$25 million. These funds are essential to help libraries modernize their technology infrastructure and facilities in order to meet the information needs of the increasing number of library users.

Technology has become a key aspect of library services. Libraries strive to ensure digital inclusion for all our citizens – so every New Yorker will be digitally literate or digitally fluent and able to freely access online information and online educational opportunities, regardless of where they live or their economic circumstances.

Last year, in response to legislation sponsored by the Chair of the Committee, the Department issued a report regarding e-books. The report identified the continuing rise in public demand for e-books from local libraries and identified some of the major challenges facing the State's public libraries in meeting that growing demand. As a response to our findings and recommendations, the Regents are requesting \$2.5 million to develop a statewide e-book platform so that the State Library can provide e-book collections in one easy-to-use location.

In closing, I want to again thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony to the Committee. We hope that we will be able to work together to enact the Regents priorities to increase the capability of our libraries across the state to help meet the growing demand for information services for all of our citizens and the communities in which they live. We look forward to your questions.