

December 13, 2016

Dear Assembly Committee on Libraries & Education Technology:

I want to thank all committee members of the Assembly Committee on Libraries and Education Technology for holding this hearing. The entire New York library community takes comfort in knowing you value our work and recognize our contributions to over 19 million New Yorkers.

I also appreciate Assemblymember Tom Abinanti's efforts to chair this committee. He has been a champion for libraries in most recent years when we need this committee most. And, I especially take pride in knowing my own Assemblymember Phil Palmesano actively serves on this committee to serve as a constant voice for public libraries in the Southern Tier.

I had the unique privilege of presenting before this committee last year as part of a roundtable discussion on 21<sup>st</sup> century technologies. Today, I will be discuss some of the same matters I did last year taking into account I have more representatives present, and because my talking points lend value to the high efficiencies our libraries and library systems provide residents. My testimony will mostly touch upon how library systems collaborate with local libraries to conserve resources and save money to ensure we are keeping pace with the 21<sup>st</sup> century technological changes.

I represent the Southern Tier Library System. We serve five rural counties located between the southern half of the Finger Lakes and the New York-Pennsylvania state border. Our largest cities are Elmira and Corning and our smallest communities are Almond and Genesee. All 48 of our libraries, with the exception of Corning and Elmira, are defined as small rural libraries based on standards developed by the American Library Association. Our average library budget is \$56,635 when excluding our four largest libraries. The average budget is \$140,683 when taking into account all libraries. Needless to say, we have some of the least publically funded libraries in the state.

Our library system is a great equalizer for our 48 member libraries. And taking into account the services our libraries provide they too are equalizers for all residents. One of our library system's core competencies is the coordination of Information Technology support. This type of collaboration is absolutely necessary in a rural environment. Only 5 of our 48 libraries employ an onsite IT technician. Taking into account the 660 network computers and devices in our libraries, and knowing there are tens of thousands of outside personal devices coming into our libraries... it is impossible for any other organization other than the library system to support this type of infrastructure and community demand.

At the moment, STLS employs 4 full time IT technicians. One of whom is our Head of Information Technology. They are responsible for maintaining all 650 networked computers, the multiple servers that support them, wireless Internet connectivity for patron devices, Internet connections through several Internet service providers, purchasing, configuring and installation of new equipment, website hosting, software updates, onsite and remote troubleshooting of equipment failures. And, administrative support through the development of policy and procedure. This list does not even include our Integrated Library System, which requires even more technical expertise, to ensure 150 plus librarians and 280,000 residents can share over 1.5 million library materials through an automated process of highly efficient information resource sharing.

It is imperative to note, this element of IT support represents 1/3 of our library system's business model. However, only 7% of these services are specifically funded through State support defined as Automation. There is about 26% shortfall in Library State Aid to support IT infrastructure in our rural library system.

So, how are we developing efficiencies despite lack of funding and an overabundance demand? This is the one specific thing I would like to highlight today. In 2014, STLS kicked off a Broadband fiber project to bring improved bandwidth capabilities to our member libraries. You may recall I said STLS coordinates Internet service for our libraries. This means we manage those connections, make payment for their accounts and troubleshoot any connectivity issues. We also apply for Federal E-rate funding to subsidize those connection. All of this is done by working with 7 Internet Service Providers and the Universal Service Administrative Company (USAC – E-rate). It is time consuming and exhausting.

To combat this challenge, we have partnered with Southern Tier Network, and local non-profit industrial development agency whose service area aligns with ours. Together, we are using NYS Library Construction Aid and federal funds, to build lateral fiber from STLS headquarters to 25 of 48 libraries. This infrastructure will create a secure private network that delivers high capacity Broadband capabilities. We are also purchasing increased bandwidth for all remaining libraries where fiber construction is cost-prohibitive through a single source Internet provider. As a result, we are able to offer a high quality Internet service to all community libraries and save millions of taxpayer dollars over the project's lifespan.

Moreover, this secure private network empowers us to maintain current IT services more efficiently. Some of these services include wireless Internet connections, software upgrades and security management. One of the most ideal benefits of this network is improved security. All library network traffic remains private. Library transactions are transmitted from each library back to STLS servers without touching public Internet. Furthermore, it enables us to administer centralized security and software management. Our IT technicians no longer have to travel the 3,500 square miles we serve to update networked computers.

Developing this infrastructure is completely forward thinking. It has a lifespan of 25 years. In the near future, STLS will be able to virtualize most of its IT maintenance functions by relocating redundant servers from individual libraries to one centralized location at the library system. In the end, it will mean all rural communities have equitable Internet connection through their local public library that exceeds New York State Broadband standards.

This is just one example, of the many discussed here today, in which library systems are increasing their government efficiencies to take on adaptive challenges, and ensure we are keeping pace with the 21<sup>st</sup> century technological changes.

Before I conclude, I would like to shed light on one more thing. I am a librarian. I've completed 7-years of higher education in areas of business and information studies. I have 14-years of public library administrative experience. However, I never thought I would be responsible for managing as many IT projects as I am today. Although, I am completely confident in the work of my organization, I can assure you libraries in New York State have never seen an adjustment in State Aid since IT and the Internet were inserted into our service model.

The fact libraries have adjusted to the Internet Revolution without a one-time re-occurring budget increase demonstrates our high level adaptability. Libraries are notorious for doing more with less. And although it is not right, we will continue to be resilient until all decision makers connect with our public return on investment.

Every year, libraries talk about working with the Assembly and Senate to secure full funding as written in Education Law. We are almost there! To me, this can be frustrating because what we should be talking about is funding libraries at \$150 million dollars. When you look at the big picture and the significant paradigm shift that took place in the 1990's, the Internet and IT has become ubiquities. IT costs are being passed down to local libraries and taxpayers because the State has yet to adjust for this change. It is no coincidence that local libraries had to start "chipping-in" to realize technological gains immediately following the advent of Internet. And, here we sit 25-years later.

In closing, Library Journal, a nationally trusted and respected publication for the library community, releases an objective report that lists all Star libraries in the United States based on selected per capita output measures (community impacts). Again and again, New York State typically ranks #1 in the US for the most Star libraries. This means two things, (1) NY State's robust library infrastructure is working. Our library systems along with our community libraries are making a difference in the lives of all New Yorkers. (2) Can you only imagine what those impacts would look like if library funding represented just 2/10 of 1% of New York State's budget? If we truly live in the Empire State that aspires to wealth and resources, let us invest in a resource that literally requires the smallest of fraction of capital to realize a wealthy quality of life through our nation's Star-ranked assets... New York libraries!

Sincerely,

Brian M. Hildreth, Executive Director  
Southern Tier Library System