



NYS Division of Budget Testimony  
Education Hearing  
December 13, 2007

I want to first thank Governor Spitzer for being the first Governor in over 12 years to both mention libraries in the State of the State Address and to include an increase in funding for libraries in the Executive Budget. I also want to thank the Governor for appointing me to the NYS Council for Universal Broadband and recognizing the vital role that libraries play in bridging the digital divide.

As you may know, the increase in Library Aid and Construction Aid that was included in the 2007-08 State Budget, came after 8 years of no increases for libraries. Between 1998 and 2006, library aid remained flat and was even cut by \$4.5 million in 2004.

Library systems, which serve over 7,000 public, school and college libraries in the state, greatly depend on state aid for their operations and many had to cut back on staff, infrastructure, and services during the 8 years of state neglect.

The additional funds in the 2007-08 State Budget allowed library systems and libraries to rebuild their services to patrons, like child and family literacy programs, improve their technology and internet capacity and renovate or expand their aged facilities.

Even with these modest increases, Library Aid still represents less than one percent of the State Budget. Yet libraries serve more than 12 million New Yorkers in our communities, in our schools and on our college campuses. No other publicly funded service serves so many with so little state support.

Libraries are an integral part of our state's P-20 educational system and beyond, because libraries provide life-long learning from toddlers to middle school students to senior citizens. Libraries serve students of all ages and play a critical role in early childhood literacy efforts. Libraries are the first place outside the home that children are exposed to books and reading for pleasure. Numerous studies demonstrate that if we can instill a love of reading in a child, the beneficial impact for that child will last a lifetime.

The Governor has commented that we need to do more to bring our economy and our citizens into the Information Age and invest in our information infrastructure. Library systems and libraries are key components of the state's information infrastructure. They are the "on ramp" onto the information highway for many of our state's citizens.

That is why New York must continue to invest in its library systems and libraries, to insure that all New Yorkers, regardless of their socio-economic background, no matter where they live, whether its Arbor Hill, Scarsdale or the Adirondacks, that all of them have equal access to the information and reading materials that will make them ready to compete in the global marketplace.

The library community is accustomed to functioning with limited resources and has been extremely frugal in their expenditures and modest in its request for funding. You will not find wasteful spending and fat in library budgets.

We are cognizant and sympathetic to the state's fiscal situation, having experienced many lean years ourselves. That is why we are only asking that the Governor refrain from cutting Library Aid in the 2008-09 Executive Budget.

In addition to maintaining level spending for libraries and library systems, we request that the Contracts for Excellence Initiative be amended to allow increased funding to be used to hire school librarians and the purchase of library books in high need school districts.

And if possible, should funds become available, the State should provide additional funds to libraries of all types to purchase books and to invest in the State Internet Library, so that all libraries and their patrons can have equal access to reading materials and online research tools that will help insure that all New Yorkers are prepared to participate and compete effectively in an Innovation Economy.

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