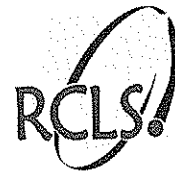


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Good afternoon. My name is Robert Hubsher. I am the Executive Director of the Ramapo Catskill Library System (RCLS) and the chair of the New York Library Association Intellectual Freedom Committee.

I am here to talk about the importance of sustaining and making permanent the increase in state aid for libraries, which was appropriated last year.

I am here to specifically to address the needs of public libraries and public library systems because that is what I know best. But I can assure you that all of the libraries and library systems in the state depend on state aid to help them meet the information, recreational and cultural needs of their communities.

Public libraries provide the residents of their communities with access to information in formats and at levels which are useful to them; they provide people with a much needed respite from the stress of daily life through recreational materials; they offer people a safe haven to meet with others – the equivalent of the community square; they support economic development by offering small and medium size business people information resources which can help them maintain and expand their businesses; they offer those seeking work information that is useful to them in their search for a job; they offer people access to consumer health information which helps them better understand what their doctors tell them and become a more active partner in their health management; they support early childhood education by introducing preschoolers to books and reading; they encourage literacy and help immigrants learn English; Public libraries make a difference in people's lives.

There is little doubt that in the twenty-first century – the information age – the success of any individual, community, state or nation is founded on their ability to get access to information and more importantly understanding how to evaluate the reliability and relevance of that information. Public libraries are one of the critical gateways to that access and assessment. In the global economy it's not about where you are but what information is available to you and how fast you can get it. Public libraries are founded on the principles of open and free access; they are dedicated to the protection of the people's first amendment rights and are committed to providing a broad range of information in a variety of formats representing different points of view.

Over the last few years New York State's libraries have lost ground in comparison to the libraries in other states, we are now ranked 22nd on Hennen's American Public Library Ratings and 35th in per capita spending for a statewide Internet library, behind states including New Jersey, Georgia, Michigan, and California.

Research on the economic value of libraries over the last decade has consistently shown that the return on investment (ROI) is excellent, around \$4.25 for every dollar spent. Public library systems enhance the quality and level of service at every public library through coordinated and cooperative services such as central cataloguing, provision of a combined or union catalog of all of its members' holdings, delivery of library materials which allows for more effective sharing of resources and a host of other services including consulting and training. Although there has been less research on the ROI for system services what little there is indicates that these services offer at least the same level of return for every dollar spent.

As you develop the State Budget, I ask you to consider the value of public libraries and public library systems and the positive impact they have on the people throughout the state.

As you are aware state aid to libraries is based on formulas in Education Law which were established in 1991. Since 1991 the rate of inflation alone has reduced the value of this aid by 52.94%, that's a loss of nearly \$0.53 for every dollar of aid.

In 2006, after many years of flat or reduced funding, the state budget included a \$3 million increase for library systems and \$14 million for public library construction.

Last year, the Governor and the legislature appropriated an increase of \$8 million in aid to systems and \$14 million in public library construction aid. These increases were greatly appreciated and needed. For the Ramapo Catskill Library System (RCLS) these additional funds made it possible to maintain our staffing levels after several years of staff reductions; undertake much needed building maintenance; build a new expanded garage to accommodate the larger vehicles required to deliver the substantially increased volume of library materials; and initiate a solar photovoltaic project which will allow us to install a solar system next spring which will generate nearly 25% of our electrical power. This system will not only reduce our carbon foot-print but help us save money on utilities.

However, these new funds were tagged as "one-time" only. Clearly RCLS and other library systems cannot initiate long-term service improvements using these funds if there is no guarantee that aid will be available in the following years to sustain programs and services. Because these funds are so vital to supporting library services around the state,

the highest priority of the New York Library Association and library community is that this \$8 million in supplemental system aid be continued and made permanent.

Our other priority is continuation of the public library construction funding. As you are aware The State Library has documented a need of over \$2 billion in construction for public library facilities. Over 60% of library buildings are more than 40 years old and do not have the capacity or wiring for today's online environment. 34% are not fully accessible by the disabled. The \$28 million in construction funding received the last two years needs to be made permanent so libraries – with matching funds from the community – can make long-term plans for capital improvements to address these needs. Over the last two years 14 RCLS member libraries were able to make use of the Construction Grants for new buildings, additions and essential renovations.

Libraries recognize the state's fiscal situation this year. Although the total needs of libraries far exceed the \$8 million system aid and the \$14 million construction aid, we are only asking that those two items to be included in the Governor's budget so that we can effectively continue the work we have started. To help put this in perspective the total state aid to libraries in 2007-08 was just under \$103 million which represented less than one-tenth of one percent of the total state budget. I appreciate the difficult task that you face in appropriating available funds to all of the worthy programs and services and I do not envy your task. I simply ask that you recognize the merit of maintaining Library Aid and Construction Aid at the 2007-08 levels and make those funding levels permanent.

Thank you for allowing me this opportunity to present the case for libraries.