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Good afternoon. My name is Kathy Miller. I am Executive Director of the Rochester Regional Library Council and the chair of the Legislative Committee of the New York Library Association.

I'm here today to talk about the importance of sustaining and making permanent the increase in state aid that was appropriated for library services last year.

Library services are vital to our community. Let me give you two local examples.

Librarians have long recognized the need for quality consumer health information. Information on the Internet is not always trustworthy. In the Rochester area, we created a consumer health website called CLIC-on-Health. There people can do a google-type search to find reliable information from the National Library of Medicine as well as local healthcare agencies that can help them. We've trained health teachers, school nurses and consumers, including seniors in sixteen senior centers in the greater Rochester area. For many of them, it was their first experience with a computer, much less the Internet.

Another community-enhancing library service is Rochester Public Library's Safe to be Smart Program. Safe to be Smart creates areas in libraries specifically for teens – a place they can “hang out” after school. The program partners with other community services to offer computer training, tutoring, mentoring, homework assistance and training in library skills such as research. At the branches where this service has been adopted, use by teens has increased by 42%.

As you develop the State Budget, I ask you to consider the positive impact of these programs - and the many more like them throughout the state.

I'm sure you are aware that for many years library funding in New York had not been keeping pace with inflation, much less with need.

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

Last year, the governor and the legislature appropriated \$8 million in aid to systems and an additional \$14 million in public library construction aid. These increases are greatly appreciated and needed. In several instances, they arrived just in time to permit library systems to sustain their full range of operations. In some cases, library systems were able to use this increased aid to add meaningful new services, such as the digitization of research materials, provision of online resources, information literacy materials, and upgraded training labs.

Having these new funds tagged as “one-time” only, however, causes significant problems. Clearly, 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 those improvements. Because these funds are so vital to sustaining 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. The State Library has documented a need of over \$2 billion in 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 matches from the community, by the way – can make long-term plans for capital improvements to address these needs.

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 be included in the Governor's budget so that we can effectively continue the work we have started.

I am hopeful that you will recognize the merit of maintaining Library Aid and Construction Aid at 2007-08 levels and making those funding levels permanent.

I appreciate your time and your consideration of our position.