

Executive Budget 2008-09
Central New York Library Resources Council
Penelope Klein, Executive Director
Comments
November 27, 2007

Good afternoon. My name is Penelope Klein and I am the Executive Director of the Central New York Library Resources Council.

I wish to comment upon 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 region. Let me give you some local examples:

Librarians have long recognized the need for quality health information as information on the Internet is not always trustworthy. In this region, the Council provides a medical circuit librarian who visits three rural hospitals. The librarian provides quality information to consumers, physicians and nurses. She has also worked with health administrators to train student nurses. For many of these information-seekers, the connection with a professional librarian has been invaluable.

The additional state aid also enabled the Council to focus on how best to share the resources of its 53 member libraries and to create a pilot program that provided regional delivery services to every member. The pilot was very successful and enabled us to develop a broader delivery service that works for everyone.

As we live in a 24/7 world, the Council recognized the need for virtual reference services that all library users can access even when their library is closed. The Council has used its increased aid to support this project, making the service available to all regional library users.

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 kept 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 much-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.

Thank you very much for allowing me to comment this afternoon; I appreciate being given time to advocate for our region's libraries.