



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Suzi Oppenheimer

Senator Oppenheimer Joins with the Westchester Library System and Local Library Directors to Call for Restoration of Library Funding in NYS FY 2010-11 Budget

SUZI OPPENHEIMER June 18, 2010

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Senator Suzi Oppenheimer (D-Mamaroneck) today joined with representatives of the Westchester Library System (WLS) and local library directors to call for the restoration of library funding in the NYS FY 2010-11 budget.

The Governor's proposed Executive Budget would cut state library funding to \$84.5 million, a reduction of approximately \$2.5 million over 2009-10 budget levels. If enacted, this would result in an \$18 million reduction in state funding over the past three years and mark the fifth time that library funding has been cut over the same period. At Senator Oppenheimer's insistence, the Senate budget resolution, adopted in March 2010, rejects the Governor's proposal and would restore library funding to existing levels. But negotiations over the final budget are ongoing and injurious cuts to public libraries remain possible.

"Our public libraries have been called 'great equalizers' – places where individuals of any means can find answers to their questions or a calm sanctuary to escape," observed Senator Oppenheimer, who chairs the Senate Education Committee. "In this time of economic hardship, people have come to our libraries in record numbers to research career opportunities and access all types of information. Yet libraries have been forced to limit hours of operation or reduce programming in the face of earlier budget cuts."

"To contemplate further reductions in library funding in this economy is unconscionable," said the Senator, who called upon her colleagues in the Legislature to reject the Governor's proposed budget cuts. "And to those who would argue that the public library is an anachronism in today's digital age, I would simply answer – walk through those doors and see the energy within these walls. Libraries remain vital places where communities of learners can satisfy their thirst for knowledge."

"While libraries are essential centers for learning, innovation, and opportunity, they constantly struggle for adequate funding," said Terry Kirchner, WLS Executive Director. "I would venture to say that the 7.5 million visits paid to Westchester's libraries annually exceed public use of just about any other institution in the county. With the help of the Westchester community, we can really make a difference when it comes to preserving and strengthening our public libraries."

"In the grand scheme of NY's budget, the loss of \$18 million in state aid to libraries over the last two years doesn't sound like much. But in the lives of the 500,000 people in Westchester who have library cards—and the thousands of others who use our public libraries without one—it is devastating," said Dave Donelson, WLS Trustee.

Noting that libraries must be given the flexibility to manage costs more efficiently, the Senator also outlined her legislation that would permit public libraries to engage in cooperative bidding for shared services, such as bulk purchases of equipment (S.3903), and to apply for local government efficiency grants (S.6875). In the previous budget year, Senator Oppenheimer had secured \$50,000 in legislative grants for each of the libraries in her Senate district. Those monies will soon become available for programming enhancement and other uses, observed the Senator.

Finally, Senator Oppenheimer kicked off her summer reading program for students in grades 4-6. The New York State Senate, in partnership with the NYS Library, developed the program to foster summer literacy and to help stem the regression in reading levels that can occur during the summer months. "I have many fond memories of visiting the library as a child and later, as a young mother, checking out books to read and enjoy with my family on relaxing summer days."

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Photo Caption: Senator Suzi Oppenheimer, flanked by library directors and representatives of the Westchester Library System, calls for restoration of state library funding in the NYS FY 2010-11 budget.

