



The Voice of the Library Community

New York Library Association

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Testimony for Joint Hearing on Elementary Education
January 28, 2021

My name is Briana McNamee. I have the privilege of serving the New York Library Association as their Director of Government Relations and Advocacy. Thank you for providing me the opportunity to testify today on behalf of our state's local, public, school, and academic libraries and library systems, and the more than 10 million New Yorkers who hold library cards.

This year, once again, the Governor's Executive Budget aggressively attacks local libraries and library services. The proposal includes:

- 7.5% reduction to the Library Aid Program
- \$14M for the State Library Construction Program
- The consolidation and reduction of reimbursable aid including Library Materials

These proposed cuts fail to acknowledge the crucial role libraries serve in our communities, and the contributions our librarians make to our state's education system.

State Library Aid:

The State Library Aid program is the primary source of funding for New York's library systems, which provide shared services and resources to each library in New York. These system services ensure that every community, and every New Yorker, regardless of relative wealth, has access to quality library materials and services. Library system services are efficient, effective, and empower libraries. According to the State Education Department (SED), each dollar invested in the State Library Aid program returns seven dollars in local library services.

The unfortunate reality is that sustained underfunding has led to depleted services, degraded technology assets, and diminished educational programming.

I should also note that the State Library Aid program makes up less than 1/10 of 1% in the State budget yet, year after year, it is eroded. Education Law requires the program be funded at \$102.6M. The current proposal, nearly \$16M below that. Yet, the Executive touts, "Better than 2008".

Library Construction:

The State Library Construction Aid program was reduced by \$20M last year. The remaining \$14M is less than 1% of the community need.

The State Division of Library Development estimates that library renovation and construction needs are \$1.5B statewide. Over 50% of public libraries in NYS are 60+ years old, and an additional 31% are 30+ years old. Investment in the Library Construction Aid program must be increased to address aging infrastructure, energy inefficient buildings and the evolving ways people use libraries.

School Libraries

The Executive Budget includes a proposal to consolidate multiple expense-based and categorical aids, into a new “Services Aid” category for 2021-2022. Amongst the eleven categories are Instructional Materials that include textbooks, software, computer hardware and library materials.

In addition to the consolidation of eleven aid categories, the Governor has proposed reducing reimbursement to the newly formed Services Aid category by over \$600 million.

School library materials include audio, visual and printed materials. Under current law, library materials may be purchased and reimbursed to a school district at the rate of up to \$6.25 per pupil. The rate was last increased 14 years ago.

While consolidation is often viewed as a measure to promote efficiency, this act does anything but. Without the dedicated funding provided by Library Materials Aid program, school libraries will be unable to maintain their current collections curated to reflect the diverse literacy needs of their students.

COVID:

The coronavirus has been a catalyst for change. For libraries, this is apparent in their operations. From curbside pickup, to expanded digital collections and unique virtual programs for patrons of all ages, libraries and their staff have chosen to adapt, reimagine and overcome. This comes at a cost.

Libraries are facing millions of dollars of unforeseen costs as they adjust operations in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Earlier this fall, the New York Library Association distributed a survey to libraries across the state to determine these expenditures and found that, on average, they spent over \$6,500 on items like PPE, plexiglass and HVAC upgrades.

The Future

Libraries cannot continue to serve their communities and students with the proposed budget. That funding was not sufficient in 2008 and, it certainly is not in 2021.

We want to be a conduit of change and progress in the months ahead.

With an investment in library programs, we’ll have the opportunity to do just that.

Library Aid: \$123.1M

Library Construction: \$45M