



Testimony for Joint Hearing on Elementary Education  
February 8, 2023

---

My name is Max Prime.

I have the privilege of serving the New York Library Association (NYLA) as their Director of Government Relations and Advocacy. Thank you for providing me with the opportunity to testify today on behalf of our state's libraries and library systems, as well as the more than 10 million New Yorkers who hold library cards.

The FY2024 Executive Budget outlines identical levels of funding for State Library Aid and the State Library Construction Program as were proposed for FY2023. This year's proposal includes:

- \$96.1M for State Library Aid
- \$14M for the State Library Construction Program

Unfortunately, while last year \$96.1M represented a \$2M increase in spending for State Library Aid over then-current funding levels, it would now constitute a \$3.5M reduction. Similarly, \$14M for State Library Construction would slash that program by \$20M and is over \$1.4B short of present community need.

Despite historic investments in pre-K and K-12 education, Governor Hochul's budget fails to recognize the essential role that libraries and library systems play as centers of foundational and lifelong learning. Simply stated, the levels of funding articulated are insufficient for the effective operation of what are critical community institutions that promote equity in education and bridge gaps in access to critical resources during still uncertain times.

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.

***NYLA is requesting \$147.1M in State Library Aid this year.***

Library Construction Aid:

For the past several years, the Executive has slashed Library Construction Aid; the last three years by \$20M. As a result, every year, the Legislature has the responsibility to identify and resecure the aid. Unfortunately, this process has left the Program stagnant.

The State Division of Library Development estimates that library renovation and construction needs are over \$1.5B statewide. Last year, over 50% of public libraries in NYS were 60+ years old, and an additional 31% were 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.

***NYLA is requesting a \$69.4M allocation to the state's Library Construction Program.***

Instructional Materials Aid:

Instructional Materials Aid includes library materials, textbooks, software, and hardware. Aid for each is critical to ensure students have access to educational materials and technology.

Since 1994, the per pupil rate for library materials has only increased \$4.25. Currently, school districts are eligible to receive up to \$6.25 per pupil for those attending public and nonpublic schools within their boundaries for such materials. This allocation level has remained flat since 2007.

District costs for hardware, software, textbooks, and library materials have increased substantially over the last 16 years. Per the School Library Journal, the average cost for one non-fiction children's or young adult title is now \$22.00.

NYLA was pleased to see the Board of Regents include an increase to IMA to reflect inflation and suggest a moderate adjustment of \$4.30 to the per pupil rate that would place it at \$10.55.

*NYLA asks the Legislature to strongly consider the State & Non-State Aid proposals as approved by the Board of Regents and proposes a further increase to \$11.00/pupil.*

The Future of Libraries:

Libraries cannot continue to serve their communities and students with the proposed budget. We implore the Legislature to invest in our state's libraries so that your constituents, our patrons, and our communities can thrive.

**Library Aid: \$147.1M**

**Library Construction: \$69.4M**

**Instructional Material Aid: \$11.00/pupil**