



New Jersey's Libraries: Community Assets

Libraries are essential community assets. Ensuring that the residents of New Jersey have strong, relevant library services to meet the challenges of the 21st century requires a funding partnership between local libraries and the state of New Jersey.

The American public values library services. A recent Pew Research survey found that 94% of Americans say that having a public library improves the quality of life in a community.

STATE LEGISLATIVE INITIATIVES 2015

- **RESTORE FUNDING FOR THE STATE PER CAPITA AID PROGRAM**
- **ESTABLISH A CAPITAL CONSTRUCTION PROGRAM FOR PUBLIC LIBRARIES**
- **UPHOLD FUNDING FOR STRONG LOCAL LIBRARIES**
- **SUPPORT FUNDING FOR NEW JERSEY LIBRARY NETWORK**

Restore Funding for the State Per Capita Aid program.

The State Per Capita Library Aid program is a direct partnership between local libraries and the state. State Aid is awarded to municipalities for library purposes based on local funding. This is direct aid to every local library. Current funding has been reduced to \$3,676,000 beginning with the FY11 state budget. That is approximately 41 cents per person per year as the state's contribution to public libraries. Since FY11, the state budget has increased from \$28.4 billion to \$33.2 billion last year. Many programs which had suffered funding cuts in the FY11 budget have been restored. Funding for library programs, however, have remained at this decreased level.

To fulfill the commitment of the state to the state per capita aid program we seek an additional \$ 5.5 million dollars. This would ensure that every library that meets minimum state library services requirements would receive at least \$1.00 per capita under the state per capita aid program.

In the last legislative session, bills were introduced (**S234 and A967**) to increase the state per capita aid program by \$3 million. These bills have bi-partisan support with Senators Diane Allen, Anthony Bucco, Shirley Turner and Jeff VanDrew and nine others championing this in the Senate and Assemblyman Troy Singleton and 26 additional sponsors in the Assembly. NJLA is grateful to the legislators who sponsored this legislation and supports all legislative initiatives to help us reach our goal of an increase of \$5.5 million for state per capita aid.

Establish a Capital Construction Program for Public Libraries

A3966 “New Jersey Library Construction Bond Act” authorizes the issuance of 125,000,000 of general obligation bonds to finance capital projects in public libraries. This bill is sponsored by Assemblyman Wayne DeAngelo (District 14). It has been referred to the Assembly State and Local Government Committee. If enacted the bill would permit a public referendum to be placed on the ballot at a general election asking the public if they would approve the state borrowing money for library capital needs.

A survey conducted by NJLA in Sept. 2014 demonstrated the strong need for capital funding for physical and technological improvements in public libraries to meet the growing demands of new technology, increased library usage including e-government demands and ADA requirements. The last program for capital construction in public libraries was passed approximately 15 years ago with a \$ 45 million bond act. With this funding sixty-eight library projects were completed.

Public libraries provide educational opportunities for all ages of the community from pre-schoolers to senior citizens offering a wide variety of programs and services – books, technology and classes.

Uphold Strong Local Support for Public Libraries.

Nearly 98% of public library funding support is from the local community. Strong library services are a critical factor in enhancing the quality of life and economic vitality of our state. Library resources provide vital educational and economic opportunities for the residents of New Jersey. Municipal public library tax funding is set at the minimum 1/3 mil level. It accounts for approximately 2% of a local property owner’s total tax bill or \$33 of tax support on a home with an equalized assessment of \$100,000.

The economic downturn of the past several years has had a direct impact on local library funding. Property values in New Jersey have decreased bringing the statewide library funding base to its lowest level since 2006. **A4001** would permit increases in the municipal free public library tax rate above the current 1/3 mil upon voter approval. This bill is sponsored by Assemblyman Gordon Johnson (District 37) and has also been referred to the Assembly State and Local Government Committee.

NJLA will oppose any efforts to weaken the current state minimum one-third mil funding floor for municipal libraries.

Support Funding for the New Jersey Library Network.

The New Jersey Library Network provides cost-sharing opportunities which provide financial savings for all types of libraries. It is fundamentally important for local libraries to expand services to residents through the availability of a statewide library delivery system and through resource sharing agreements. Since its inception, this extraordinarily successful program has resulted in the savings of millions of dollars for local libraries.