



**TESTIMONY OF PATRICIA A. TUMULTY, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
NEW JERSEY LIBRARY ASSOCIATION
BEFORE THE SENATE BUDGET AND APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE
MARCH 22, 2016**

I am Patricia Tumulty, the Executive Director of the New Jersey Library Association. I am speaking today directly on behalf of the 1600 members of our Association and the 1500 members of the New Jersey Library Trustee Association.

I would like to start today with a quote from a recent article in The Atlantic Magazine by James and Deb Fallow who have been writing a series of articles called "Can America Put Itself Back Together?" which is

"As we traveled around the U. S. reporting on the revival of towns and cities, we always made the local library an early stop. We'd hit the newspaper offices, the chamber of commerce, city hall, and Main Street for an introduction to the economics, politics, and stresses of a town. The visit to the public library revealed its heart and soul.

The traditional impression of libraries as places for quiet reading, research, and borrowing books- and of librarians as schoolmarmish shush-ers- is outdated, as they have metamorphosed into bustling civic centers. There are three areas where libraries function as vibrant centers of American's town: technology, education, and community."

I certainly believe that the Fallows' assessment of our libraries is very accurate. What is outdated, unfortunately, is state support of libraries.

Is the 7th Time the Charm?

I have appeared before this committee many times. This is the 7th time we have discussed Governor Christie's proposal to provide limited funding for the state per capita aid program for public libraries. Governor Christie's budget is now 20% larger than when we first received our first cut. And yes, I know a significant part of the new funding is going to pension funding but not everything. Partial funding has been restored for many programs but not for this significant program.

Let me again remind you that the state per capita aid program for libraries is \$3,670,000 or approximately 42 cents per person per year- less than the cost of one postage stamp.

Every year our organization struggles to find the right way to convey our message to you. In the past we have done postcards, emails etc. – anything to get your attention. Last year, we were very grateful that Assemblyman Singleton and Senator Allen introduced a separate piece of legislation to provide an additional 3 million to this program. Our goal was to have a bill which we could use to talk with all members of the legislature about the role of public libraries in our communities. We also believed this could be used to influence the members of this committee to include this additional funding in your budget proposal. We believe we were very successful. We received wide-spread support with over 1/3 of the legislature from both houses and from both parties (including many of you) who signed on to the

bills. I don't think many bills in the last session of the legislature had that many co-sponsors. We also received numerous resolutions from legislators to include this funding in last years' budget but in the end we were, unfortunately, extremely disappointed. We were not included in your final budget proposal. And so we try again for the 7th time- is the 7th time the charm as they say.

RETURN ON INVESTMENT

Some people have suggested that we try Return On Investment to convince you. ROI studies are often helpful in demonstrating your case. Yes, we believe public library funding provides you with an excellent ROI. My only problem is what matrix should I use. Let me give you some examples.

Total number of visits. I looked at total visits to local public libraries in a year as a starting point for ROI. In 2014 (last figures available) there were 44,828,878 visits to public libraries. So if you divide that number into your appropriation it would be less than a penny per visit. It also could mean there for 5.5 visits per capita to our public libraries or the number of people who used public libraries could fill Rutgers Football Stadium 855 times. We believe this is an excellent return on investment. This was just the physical visits to public libraries and does not include the thousands of times people have used library services remotely through their computers or smart phones.

How about Internet Use- By state regulation every public library which receives state per capita aid MUST provide free Internet access to the public. Everyone in this room probably does have a computer but national statistics reveal approximately 20% of all people still don't have a computer and this is particularly true in our urban areas. Internet access has become critical as more and more governmental services are only available on the Internet. Many bills that you have proposed in the legislature are now requiring government information only be published online. You are automatically disenfranchising a large portion of the public. Currently, we have 7,760 public access computers in public libraries or approximately 1 per 1,155 residents. And no, I can't tell you how old some of them are but I think it is fair guess that most don't have Windows 10.

There is no technology fund for public libraries- so how many new computers do you think they can purchase with 42 cents per person per year? Providing Internet access is just one of the state regulations which public libraries must meet to receive funding under the per capita aid program.

Last year I stated to this committee that I believe that funding for public libraries needs to be looked at in the context of all funding that we spend on k-12 schools and higher education. We are integral to the educational infrastructure of our state.

Let me give you a few more Return on Investment examples-

Numerous studies have concluded that the most effective way to keep students from the "summer slide" is by providing learning opportunities in the summer. All New Jersey public libraries participate in a statewide summer reading program sponsored by the NJ State Library. Last year, NJ kids read 2,931,810 books during the summer which divided by your investment of 3.67 million is about \$1.25 per book. Since the average cost of a children's book is \$18.10 you get a great deal.

Or perhaps it is our role in preschool education which will demonstrate our worth. As you are discussing the merits of preschool education for 3 and 4 year olds, remember that public libraries provide early literacy programs well before those ages. Again studies show that the earlier a child is exposed to reading and books the better it is for their educational development. I am sorry I can't estimate an exact ROI on these programs but I believe the number would be staggering.

Clearly both of these programs have significant educational importance to students in NJ and I could give you details on many more programs. I also can cite other examples of important services in our communities such as helping job seekers, providing ESL and computer classes, hosting Affordable Care enrollment fairs etc. etc. All of these provide a significant ROI to NJ residents.

No, fortunately public libraries are not closing in New Jersey but they are steadily eroding. We have seen that unfold dramatically recently in West Orange and Leonia where community residents have spoken out loudly regarding local proposed cuts in library services. The majority of funding for public libraries comes from local property taxes. Unfortunately, these have also suffered a sharp decline. In 2009 the average support for public libraries was \$67.21 per capita and in 2014 it was \$57.75 almost a \$10 per capita drop.

Yes, we believe our figures certainly demonstrate that you get a very significant ROI for your 42 cents per year- less that than the cost of a postage stamp.

So why do we come back year after year asking for this funding? We are optimistic. We do this because we can demonstrate that every dollar provides a tremendous ROI for the residents of New Jersey. We have also long known what the Fallons observed on their journal across America- that public libraries are the heart and soul of the community. We see it every day.