



**TESTIMONY OF PATRICIA A. TUMULTY, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
NEW JERSEY LIBRARY ASSOCIATION
BEFORE THE ASSEMBLY APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE
APRIL 9, 2018**

I am Patricia Tumulty, the Executive Director of the New Jersey Library Association. I am speaking today on behalf of our Association and for the members of the New Jersey Library Trustee Association who are directly responsible for library services in their communities.

We all looked forward with great anticipation to Governor Murphy's first budget address. The Governor is promising to build a stronger and fairer New Jersey for the residents of our state. He has presented a budget of optimism with significant increases in funding for educational programs.

The budget which you are discussing is \$37.4 billion; this is over 7% higher than the last year's budget. It promises to invest significantly in educational opportunities for the residents of New Jersey with increases in Pre-K funding, formula school aid for most school districts and increases in funding for Higher Education and TAG support.

Yet one area of education, which is provided in virtually all communities in New Jersey is again left behind. That is the funding for the State Library Per Capita Aid program, which is the foundation for state support for public libraries. It remains at the same reduced funding level as in the previous 8 budgets which Governor Christie presented; this level is \$3.6 million and far below the authorized funding level of \$10.6 million.

I am here to request that in this budget, which values educational opportunities, funding for this vital community educational program is not forgotten and will reach that \$10.6 million level. That would mean the State's contribution to library service would be slightly over \$1.00 per capita per year. Public libraries are educational institution too.

What does the public believe about funding for library programs? A recent national study called *From Awareness to Funding* reports that 58% of the public believe that strong public libraries advance education in their communities. Here in New Jersey, that question was answered strongly by our voters last November when the N J Library Construction Bond Act passed by a 60% margin. This bond initiative was endorsed by a wide range of groups including local governmental officials, union and business organizations and numerous nonprofit groups. The message was clear- NJ residents value and support public libraries.

This budget provides billions more in funding but not one additional penny for the support of public libraries which provide a wide-range of educational opportunities in communities throughout New Jersey. Public libraries are about lifelong education; no other educational institution can fill this purpose as broadly. Libraries are about continuous learning for all ages.

Here are a few of the educational services our libraries provide:

Literacy activities are offered for our youngest residents through thousands of story hours which open to children and their caregivers the magic of reading. These activities are offered well before a child reaches Pre-K school age.

Educational resources for students of all ages, from elementary school through graduate school, are available in print and online. In addition, many public libraries provide after school tutoring assistance.

Statewide summer reading program in all libraries which keeps kids from experiencing the “summer slide”. Last year almost 2 million books were read by NJ kids during the summer, ensuring that these children do not lose the academic achievement of the previous school year.

NJ Makers Day is a statewide celebration of making and maker culture that takes place every March in the Garden State and furthers the reach of STEAM programming. The primary goal is to enhance community engagement and facilitate connections among New Jersey residents by exploring new and interesting opportunities for community-wide education, entrepreneurship and hands-on learning experiences. Activities included are 3-D printers and robotics competitions, among other options. 180 libraries participated throughout New Jersey.

Online educational resources for adults include programs such as the popular language learning tool, Rosetta Stone. Libraries offer many resources which assist adults in establishing new businesses or preparing for employment tests; the State Library has partnered with the NJ Department of Labor to fund career centers in libraries throughout NJ for this purpose.

New Jersey public libraries are the only governmental organization that is required by law to provide free internet access so all residents can experience the benefits of the Internet even if they don't have broadband at home. Yet, public libraries have not received any additional funding to support this technology in over 20 years. Libraries are on the front lines of alleviating the digital divide for thousands of residents.

Most public library funding is from local property taxes. Unfortunately, the economic recession in New Jersey in the last decade has severely impacted local library funding. Additional state aid dollars, therefore, would provide real services in every community. Services which can't be offered through local support.

Libraries are allowed to determine locally how they will spend the additional state aid dollars. Let me give you examples from some of your own communities.

- The Monroe Twp. Library in Middlesex County would hire a part-time staff member to work specifically with the senior communities demonstrating how to use new technologies for daily living.
- The Newark Public Library would be able to open its branch libraries on Mondays. They are now closed because of budget shortfalls.
- The Hunterdon County Library would hire a librarian specifically to work with small businesses and nonprofit organizations.

These dollars provide real opportunities in every community- urban, rural and suburban. These dollars matter. They are direct services to your residents.

This is the Governor's first budget. We look forward "educating" him on the importance of public library funding for the vitality of our communities because public libraries are educational institutions too.

We are grateful that, as legislators, you understand that value. Last year, when the NJ Library Construction Bond Act was passed, it was a demonstration of the faith of the Legislature in the importance of public libraries. It is now the time to again demonstrate your support by sending Governor Murphy a state budget which includes funding for this vital library program. The State Per Capita Aid program should be fully funded at the \$10.6 million level.

When we were advocating for the Construction Bond Act last year, we adopted the slogan: "Libraries Build Communities." It obviously resonated with the public. Our new slogan is: "State Aid Builds Libraries. " We are looking forward to working with you to make that happen again.

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