



**TESTIMONY OF PATRICIA A. TUMULTY, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
NEW JERSEY LIBRARY ASSOCIATION
BEFORE THE SENATE BUDGET AND APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE
MARCH 28, 2019**

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.

I think you are all familiar with the phrase “No matter how much things change, they stay the same.” That certainly applies to state support for fundamental library programs during the past decade. Yes, I said decade - ten straight state budgets. Eight budgets from Governor Christie and now two budgets from Governor Murphy which have done nothing to support quality library services in New Jersey.

So, what has changed- **the budget**. You are reviewing a budget which is 38.6 billion dollars. When library funding was first cut during Governor Christies’ first budget for FY10 the total state budget for that year was approximately 29 billion. The budget you are reviewing is almost 10 billion or 31% higher than FY10 **yet not one penny** more has been allocated to improve library services which enhance the lives of millions of residents of New Jersey.

We applaud Governor Murphy for his commitment to educational funding. This budget provides additional funding for pre-k programs, increases in basic school aid to 8.7 billion, expansion of the free county college tuition program and a pilot program for new funding for higher education. All are wonderful initiatives. BUT libraries are also educational institutions and we have again been left behind in this budget.

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 programs in all libraries 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 last weekend in public libraries throughout the state. 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, STEAM activities and hands-on learning experiences. Activities included are 3-D printers and robotics competitions, among other options. Public libraries throughout New Jersey participated with thousands of people attending these programs.

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.

These are all valuable educational opportunities for your communities yet their value is not demonstrated through state funding.

Two Complimentary programs provide the Foundation of State Support for Libraries.

The first major program is the **State Per Capita** aid program which provides direct support to all public libraries. This program is a partnership between the state and local libraries. In order to receive state per capita aid, libraries must agree to meet specific standards such as hours open, number of staff, etc. The local libraries have been keeping their part of this partnership but the state has not. 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.

This budget is again proposing funding at 3.67 million which is only 34% of its full authorized funding level of 10.6 million. Yes, 41 cents per capita a year is all the support you directly supply to public libraries. This is the same reduced funding level as it has been through the nine previous state budgets. It has long been the goal of our Association that libraries receive the modest amount of a \$1.20 per capita. What a difference that would make for our libraries!

The second major program is **The New Jersey Library Network** which has been in existence for over 30 years and is a model of shared services by providing cooperative purchasing agreements for electronic library resources and a delivery system that permits libraries to borrow materials throughout the state. It has been flat funded for a decade. Since it is solely reliant on state funding, The Network is currently reviewing its program with the anticipation of

reducing services. It has already announced the elimination of some staff positions. We are seeking \$750,000 to ensure that the program can be operational in the next fiscal year.

Advocacy

I am told the best way to do advocacy is through stories- but my problem is, whose story should I tell because we have millions of them.

Should I tell you about Christopher Vanneman, a 3 year old from Quinton Twp., who is participating in the 1000 books before Kindergarten program at the Cumberland County Library. Just one of many libraries that hosts preschool programs.

Or should I pick out one of the thousands who participated in Makers Day last weekend who used a 3-D printer for the first time or took a coding class.

Or should I talk about the Pathway to Citizenship program held at the North Bergen Public Library.

Or how the Camden County Library is taking library services out into the community with “ pop-up” libraries in community spaces.

I have a million advocacy stories million stories but, unfortunately, only a few dollars.

Thank you.

Many of you and your colleagues are listening to your residents regarding the need to provide much needed state funding for library services.

Currently, there are several bills in the legislature to provide additional these funds.

S2668/A 3801 would provide the 10.6 million to fully fund the State Per Capita aid program. The prime sponsors in the Senate are Senators Greenstein and Cunningham and in the Assembly, the prime sponsors are Assemblymen Land and DeAngelo. Over 30 legislators in both houses have already sponsored or co-sponsored these bills.

S3395/A4815 would provide an additional \$750,000 to the New Jersey Library Network. The prime sponsors of the Senate legislation are Senators Andrzejczak and Sarlo. In the Assembly, the prime sponsors are Asm. Land, Milam and Assemblywoman Murphy. A total of 15 legislators have sponsors or co-sponsors these bills.

We believe many of you and your colleagues are sending the message that **THIS** is the budget year to **FINALLY** support library programs.

NJ Construction Bond Act

We know the residents of New Jersey support our libraries. In Nov 2017 the public voted overwhelmingly to fund NJ Library Construction Bond Act which passed with a 60% approval rating. Yet, these bonds have not yet been sold. We understand that things are being to move

but it has been a very, very slow process. Several newspapers have written stories regarding the delay in the sale of these bonds, including:

Last Sunday, *The Record* concluded its editorial on the Bond Act by saying “Libraries have served this state for decades sometimes having to survive on crumbs because of miserly, shortsighted politicians who don’t see the value of one of our last public spaces. Those spaces must be kept relevant, they must be kept open, and they must be kept up to grade structurally.”

Those aren’t my words but I believe they strongly emphasized the important role our libraries play as vital public spaces and support the need to fund them now. The Bond Act would support capital needs and our budget request would be for operational funding.

To fund both of these programs at the levels needed would be less than 8 million or approximately an additional \$1.00 per capita. Considering it has been a decade since **ANY** new money was appropriated, we believe it is a reasonable request. These dollars provide real opportunities in every community - urban, rural and suburban. These dollars matter. They are direct services to your residents.

With your support, we believe this is the budget year things will change.

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