



**TESTIMONY OF PATRICIA A. TUMULTY, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
NEW JERSEY LIBRARY ASSOCIATION
BEFORE THE ASSEMBLY BUDGET COMMITTEE
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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.

There has been quite a bit of discussion about “fake news” recently. The public wonders who can it trust. Well, the answer is their libraries.

As a librarians we deal with facts every day and not fake news. So let me provide you with some facts regarding public support for libraries.

In September 2016, the Pew Research Institute did a survey and their results found:

- 77% of Americans believe that libraries are essential to providing resources they could trust
- 69% of American say local libraries contribute a lot to providing a safe place for the community
- 58% of Americans think they contribute toward creating educational opportunities for all ages
- 49% of Americans think they spark creativity among young people
- 47% of Americans think libraries are a trusted place to find new technologies

In another survey entitled “Local Libraries Advancing Community Goals” conducted last fall by the International City/County Management Association and the Aspen Institute local governmental leaders were asked what they thought about public libraries in their communities. Their Executive Director Marc Ott explained, “Through ICMA’s recent survey and related activities, we are documenting the innovative ways that public leaders are leveraging their local libraries to build stronger communities. “

This is not fake news.

ICMA survey confirmed many of the same results as Pew. The survey cited five specific areas where public libraries are demonstrating to be extremely useful to local government. These are:

- High speed internet - high 76%
- Digital literacy- high 52%
- Early childhood education high- 67.1%
- Primary and secondary school attainment- high 67.9
- Civic engagement - high 52.7%

Now let me give you some other realities- not fake news

This is the eight straight state budget which has provided reduced funding for the public library state per capita aid program. The first state budget presented by Governor Christie was approximately 28.4 billion. This budget is proposed at 35.5 billion. This is 23% higher than when we received that first cut eight years ago. And yes, I know a significant part of the new funding is going to pension restoration but not everything. Approximately 39% of the budget does go to education. As the surveys cited above show both the public and local governmental officials see a direct link between public libraries and the educational opportunities provided to the residents of their communities. Yet this reduction in library funding has been for 8 straight years. The reality is that there is no connection between education funding and our public libraries.

Let me state again- the current appropriation in this budget and in the last seven budgets is Just 41 cents per person per year.

We are very grateful to Assemblyman Singleton and Senator Allen for introducing separate legislation which would provide 3 million in state per capita aid. Although we recognize that the budget committees are the most important vehicle for restoration of this aid, these separate bills are an opportunity for the library community to discuss with all members of the legislature the need for this increase in funding. To date we have 41 sponsors in both houses of the legislature both democrats and republicans. Many of you are sponsors. This number of sponsors show there is great deal of support for this increase in funding for the state per capita aid program.

So what about support for the library services as demonstrated by these recent surveys.

As the 84 per cent of the local government officials surveyed they support strong broadband and Wi-Fi access for the public through the local library. By state regulation every public library in New Jersey MUST provide free Internet access. In most communities it is the only place of free internet access in a community. National statistics show that approximately 20% of all people still do not have a computer at home. Although New Jersey regulations require that public libraries provide free Internet access it doesn't provide is any source of funding to update computers or technology at our local libraries. I am sure many of you have new smart phones etc. which have been updated in the past seven years. How much new technology (even though you are required to have it) can any library buy for its public on just 41 cents per person per year?

Again the surveys cited demonstrated that the public and local government officials believe public libraries are integral to the education of students and for providing preschool literacy services. Numerous studies have concluded that the most effective way to keep students from the "summer slide" is by providing reading opportunities over the summer. All New Jersey public library participate in a statewide summer reading program sponsored by the NJ State Library. According to book publishers the average cost of a new children's book is \$18.10. So how many new books do you think libraries can buy per year to support this program on just 41 cents per person per year?

The local government survey also cited preschool education as an important service to its residents. Public libraries provide a wide variety of preschool learning sessions for children and their caregivers well before they enter school. Again studies show that the earlier a child is exposed to reading and books the better for their educational development. Again 41 cents per year does not buy very much.

It is true that the majority of funding for public libraries does come from local property taxes. Unfortunately, the economic downturn has also drastically impacted local support. In 2009 the average support for public libraries per person was \$67.21 and in 2015 it was \$58.86 almost a \$10 per capita drop.

And just last week, we learned that President Trump's proposed budget would eliminate the Institute of Museum and Library Services, an independent agency, which provides federal support to the NJ State Library. If President Trump's budget is passed, NJ will lose \$4,029,000 in federal funds. These funds are used to support a variety of programs including the NJ Talking Book and Braille Library and also provides funding for numerous electronic resources which for school and public libraries. It is impossible to determine how we will survive if the federal budget is enacted with this severe cut.

In the surveys I quoted above, the public and local officials envision an expanded role for public libraries in their future. I am not sure how we make that happen when we face elimination or erosion of our funding sources on the local, state and federal levels.

We do share one common concern with Governor Christie- the aging infrastructure of our public buildings. It has been over 15 years since any construction funds have been made available to public libraries. Although some communities with historic buildings have been able to access limited funding, the vast majority of our public library buildings do not qualify. That is why we are supporting a construction bond legislation that if passed, would go to the voters in November to provide capital funding for library construction and technology. There are numerous public library buildings in New Jersey which are simply inadequate to meet current needs. In a survey conducted by our Association, 60% of libraries responded that they needed additional space. Another 70% indicated the need for capital improvements such as carpeting, furnishings and technology. And yes, like the State House we do get many, many 4th graders coming into our libraries as well as millions of other visitors. At last count we had 43,073,784 last year. That is approximately 5 visits per New Jersey resident per year. This does not count millions of interactions residents have with libraries using computers, cell phones and tablets remotely to access library services. Again I give you facts not fake news.

But all librarians whether they work in school, public or academic libraries are extremely concerned about the lack of information literacy skills in our students today. The statistics are shocking: 20% of our high schools have no certified school media specialist; 33 districts have no school library media specialists at the elementary level and 91 districts have no school media specialists at ALL. No wonder fake news proliferates. How are students prepared to do complex information tasks when they don't know how to find accurate information sources. We have worked with Asw. Sumter and Asm. Wimberly to introduce legislation which would require school media specialists in each school. In addition, we are proposing legislation to require an information literacy curriculum for all grades K-12. This would ensure that students are adequately prepared to use all types of information both in digital and print format. We can't just decry fake news we must proactively provide an educational foundation which gives all students the tools to discern the complex informational world we live in today.

The reality facing our public libraries is extremely troubling- the decline of property values on the local level, 8 straight years of diminished state support and now the potential of elimination of federal funding. This has caused a serious erosion of public libraries services just at a time when the public and local government officials indicate they are needed the most. This is not fake news but a harsh reality.

