



November 3, 2015

ASSEMBLY STANDING COMMITTEE  
ON LIBRARIES AND EDUCATION TECHNOLOGY

**Testimony on  
Funding Public Libraries**

The Chautauqua-Cattaraugus Library System serves 36 member libraries in rural, economically depressed communities. Our libraries improve lives. They provide critical services to those in need, and are partners in education, providing opportunities for children where few alternatives exist.

Library Systems make libraries efficient and effective, turning every invested dollar into at least seven dollars of benefit to the community. Through shared services and economies of scale, we add enormous value at a tiny cost. For example, we provide our libraries with technology assistance, delivery of library materials between libraries, workshops to train library staff, and an online catalog so users at any library can request items from any other library. And this year we are working to bring high speed broadband and high quality equipment into every one of our libraries by leveraging federal E-Rate funding and partnering with local schools.

Our libraries provide programs and materials that improve quality of life, power the economy, and provide opportunity. They provide computer classes, job skills training, and are the only place in the community with free access to computers and the internet. Their services for children give families a head start on education, keep summer learning fun, and give school children safe and productive after school environments.

State aid for libraries is now below 2000 levels. Increases in expenses have far outpaced income. At the same time, the tax cap has made it difficult for our libraries to receive adequate funding, and they are increasingly turning to their Library System for help. We have balanced our budgets through difficult cuts to staffing and services, and ultimately these cuts have hurt efficiency across our two counties. Our single employee in the IT department, for example, has nowhere near the time to assist all 36 libraries with planning, installation, and maintenance of computer equipment. This leaves our libraries with outdated computer equipment, insufficient access to affordable IT expertise, and poorly maintained networks. An increase in state aid would allow us to hire additional IT staff so that every library has free access to the IT support it needs.

Unfortunately, cuts to library aid came at a time when library use and the need for after school services have increased. More than ever, we need the resources to strengthen our libraries so they can help the people who need them most. Our rural communities are not bouncing back from

recession quickly, but every child still deserves the opportunity to reach their potential and power tomorrow's economy.

Public Library Construction Aid is incredibly important and beneficial to our libraries, but it has not been enough to meet demand. The Ahira Hall Memorial Library in Brocton serves an economically disadvantaged community in a building far too small to meet the needs of its users. The small amount of Construction funding we can provide has met temporary needs for improving a roof that was caving in and a basement that is chronically wet, but a long term solution remains out of grasp. A record number of children now visit the library after school to receive homework help and complete their online homework, but the library does not have nearly space it needs to accommodate everyone. Without better investment from Construction funds, the library will never be able to meet the needs of those schoolchildren.

Across our two counties, we see the same story: increased use of the library but decreased funding. Libraries today do more than ever before, and are needed more than ever before. The Chautauqua-Cattaraugus Library System is committed to giving every child a library that is as strong as the library their parents and grandparents had.

Please fully fund library aid. With your help we will building stronger libraries and provide education for everyone. On behalf of our 36 libraries and the communities they serve, I thank you for your support.

Respectfully Submitted.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Eli Guinee', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Eli Guinee

Executive Director